

Prodigies of the Prairie: The Talent Development Stories of
Four Elite Nebraska Youth Performers

Kenneth A. Kiewra and Amanda L. Witte

University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Abstract

This qualitative study addressed this primary question: How does talent develop among four Nebraska youth? Four highly talented Nebraska youth in the domains of baton twirling, swimming, rodeo, and both softball and music were interviewed along with their parents and coaches. Results revealed unique talent stories and commonalities among those stories. The stories described a *twirling talent trilogy* that involved coordinated efforts among student, parent, and coach; a *swimmer with all hands on deck* that involved supportive family, strong coaching, and center of excellence; a *one-horse talent hotbed* with a talent-equipped ranch and rodeo coaching parents; and a *father-influenced music and softball double play* where a father led the way to dual talents. The commonalities among stories included hard work, focus on fundamentals, prior family links to the talent domain, extraordinary parent involvement, and a parent-engineered environment for talent development. The limited role schools play in fostering talent and parenting implications were also addressed.

Keywords: Talent Development, Expertise, Athletic Performance, Parent Influence, Coaching Influence

Prodigies of the Prairie: The Talent Development Stories of
Four Elite Nebraska Youth Performers

In the finals of the 2016 Nebraska State High School Swimming Championships, an event held annually since 1973, Olivia Calegan, a high school junior, set five state swim records in one day. What makes Olivia Calegan and other talented young performers so good?

Benjamin Bloom (1985) was among the first to investigate talent and determine the conditions that allow talent to blossom (also see Feldman, 1982; MacKinnon, 1964; Renzulli, 1978; Stanley & Benbow, 1986). Bloom conducted retrospective interviews with 120 talented performers and their parents in six talent domains such as music, science, art, and athletics. His overriding conclusion was: “What any person in the world can learn, almost all persons can learn if provided with the appropriate conditions of learning” (p. 538).

Since Bloom’s seminal investigation, a growing body of talent development literature has identified the environmental conditions most likely to foster talent. These include (a) extensive and deliberate practice (Ericsson & Pool, 2016), (b) substantial family influence (Kiewra & Witte, 2015), (c) accomplished mentors or coaches (Czajkowski, 2010; Hill, MacNamara, & Collins, 2015), and (d) a center of excellence where talent can flourish (Gardner, 1993; Ott Schacht & Kiewra, 2016; Syed, 2010).

Extensive and Deliberate Practice

The 10-year Rule (Gardner, 1993; Hayes, 1985) suggests that creative individuals often practice and toil in a domain for 10 or more years before producing a creative work. The same extensive practice period has been recognized among talented individuals in domains such as chess (Kiewra & Witte, 2013; Kiewra, O’Connor, McCrudden, & Liu, 2006), baton twirling (Kiewra & Witte, 2015), and music (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). Ericsson and

Pool (2016), however, contend that practice must be carried out in a deliberate way, which Ericsson describes as focused, effortful, and intense practice aimed at incremental improvement.

The notion that deliberate practice is what largely separates individuals operating at various levels of expertise has been challenged by Hambrick and colleagues (Hambrick et al., 2014), who contend that deliberate practice is not sufficient to explain talent differences in music and chess—two of the most widely researched talent domains. They contend that deliberate practice amounts can vary widely among experts in those domains and that other factors such as intelligence and genetics also play important contributory roles.

Substantial Family Influence

Beginning with the work of Bloom (1985), the importance of family influence on children's talent development in sports and other domains is well documented (e.g., Brustad, 1993; Côté, 1999; Davidson, Howe, Moore, & Sloboda, 1996; Harwood, Douglas, & Minniti, 2012; Hellstedt, 1987; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008; Woolger & Power, 1993; Wu, 2008). Regarding parental influence, Kiewra and colleagues investigated parents' talent development roles in domains such as chess (Kiewra et al., 2006; Kiewra & Witte, 2013), baton twirling (Kiewra & Witte, 2015), and spelling, music, volleyball, and writing (Witte et al., 2015), and concluded that parents play crucial roles in all aspects of their children's talent development (see also Kiewra, 2015). First, parents often introduced children to their eventual talent domain at an early age. This introduction occurred because a parent was already involved in the talent area as a performer or coach (see also Davidson et al., 1996; Piirto, 1995) or because parents noticed a child's aptitude or interest and matched that to a talent domain. Second, once the child showed interest in the domain, parents arranged for appropriate coaching. Parents often assumed the coaching role initially but sought stronger coaching as the child progressed. Third, along with

elite coaching came added lessons, practices, and competitions for the child and increased and corresponding managerial duties and financial responsibilities for parents (see also Côté, 1999, Davidson et al., 1996). Parents investigated by Witte and colleagues (2015) said that managing their child's talent development was like a second job. They handled all managerial duties such as arranging and monitoring lessons, purchasing equipment and performance attire, scheduling competitions, arranging travel, and traveling extensively. Moreover, they often made family sacrifices to afford the tens of thousands of dollars' cost. Fourth, parents fostered children's work ethic and motivation by modeling and expecting high achievement (see also Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008, Sloboda & Howe, 1991). Although talented children are generally self-motivated, parents sometimes supplied a motivational kick. Witte and colleagues reported that parents generally offered their talented children this motivational sentiment: "Developing talent has to be your choice and dream. If that is your choice, we'll help you however we can. If you commit, then we'll commit. However, if you are not fully committed, then we won't be either" (pp. 92–93).

Siblings, too, sometimes play a supportive role in talent development. Older siblings sometimes blaze and smooth the talent trail for younger siblings (Côté & Hay, 2002). Olympic speed skaters Bonnie Blair and Dan Jansen were the last-born children in large families where older brothers and sisters were already accomplished skaters (Ott Schacht & Kiewra, 2016). Their older siblings taught them to skate, were practice partners, and provided motivational support.

Accomplished Mentors or Coaches

Those who ascend the talent ranks have mentors or coaches. Bloom (1985) found that talented individuals often progressed through three mentors, each serving a different and

progressively more refined function compatible with the individual's growing talent. Research on talented young chess players mirrors Bloom's (1985) mentoring progression (Kiewra et al., 2006; Kiewra & Witte, 2013). Young players were often first coached by a parent or a local player. Eventually, families sought out stronger coaches who were national or international masters. All the young students in the later study eventually secured coaches who were grandmaster level players—the highest chess title designation. To work with such accomplished coaches, families often had to arrange lessons via the internet or fly coaches to their homes for extended lessons.

Coaches also provide psychosocial skills and support. According to Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011), psychosocial skills include support strategies like handling setbacks, adjusting anxiety for optimal performance, and imagining success. A study of highly successful collegiate athletes found that, as the athletes grew older, the influence of coaches increased not only in terms of technical information and advice but also in terms of motivational and emotional support (Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006).

Centers of Excellence

Centers of excellence are places or facilities where top performers congregate to learn from one another and from top teachers who have also congregated there. Talented youth often reside in or gravitate to centers of excellence. Several chess players lived in New York City, which was an environment ripe with chess history, elite players and coaches, strong chess clubs, chess-in-school programs, and frequent tournaments (Kiewra et al., 2006; Kiewra & Witte, 2013). The family of one Olympic figure skater moved 200 miles to Colorado Springs so that their son could train with an accomplished coach and other talented skaters, and a music prodigy and his mother flew each week to meet with an elite music teacher (Witte et al., 2015).

Sometimes parents create centers of excellence at home for their talented children. For example, talented chess players and baton twirlers' parents invited elite coaches to visit for extended periods to provide concentrated training for their children (Witte et al., 2015).

The Present Study

The present study extends previous research in three ways. First, most previous research has focused on just one or some of the four talent development factors (family influence, practice, coaching, and centers of excellence) at a time (e.g., Colvin, 2008; Ericsson, 2002; Syed, 2010). The present study explored all four factors concomitantly to assess their relative contributions to talent development. Second, previous research tends to solicit information from individual sources: talented performers (e.g., Goldstein & Winner, 2009), parents (e.g., Wu, 2008), or coaches (Hill, MacNamara, & Collins, 2015), but not all three. The present study solicited information from all three sources to gain a more complete and accurate view of talent development. Third, previous talent research usually pertains to a single talent domain (e.g., Wolfenden & Holt, 2005) and includes participants from varying geographic areas (e.g., Sanchez, Aujla, & Nordin-Bates, 2013; Weissensteiner, Abernethy, Farrow, & Muller, 2008). The present study investigated talented performers, each from a unique domain, who were raised in a single geographic area: Nebraska. This last research extension illustrated how youth in various talent domains prosper in a geographic area not normally considered a center of excellence for talent development.

The purpose of the present study, then, was to uncover the talent development stories of four highly accomplished Nebraska youth. The central research question was: (1) How does talent develop in four Nebraska youth especially in relationship to the following talent development factors: practice, family influence, coaching, and centers of excellence?

Methods

In order to investigate the talent development stories of four Nebraska youth, this study followed a qualitative approach and delved deeply into the lived experiences of participants. Specifically, in keeping with the strong tradition of using qualitative research methods to investigate talent development (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Kiewra & Witte, 2013), this study used multiple-case analysis (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2003) as the mode of qualitative inquiry. This involved purposefully selecting four highly talented youths who could provide detailed case descriptions of talent development in Nebraska and interviewing them, their parents, and their coaches using an inductive approach (Creswell, 2003). This approach allowed us to describe how talent developed for each talented youth, reflect on how these four cases were similar, and pose naturalistic generalizations about talent development. This approach was consistent with good qualitative case development (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2013). The study was completed in three phases: (a) participant selection, (b) data gathering, and (c) data analysis and interpretation.

Participant Selection

Four Nebraska youth who achieved state, national, or world-class standing in various domains were purposefully selected for participation using criterion sampling (Creswell, 2016). We first contacted school principals across the state of Nebraska and asked them to identify youth in their respective communities who were considered among the top in their respective domains and to briefly chronicle their accomplishments. From the list of about 50 possible participants generated from this approach, we narrowed the list to include only participants who were high school age and who had achieved state, national, or world acclaim. From this list of eight highly acclaimed youth, we chose the four we believed to be most accomplished based on

an internet search of each person's accomplishments. We contacted the parents of the four identified youths, provided a brief description of the study, and invited the youths, their parents, and their coaches to participate. All agreed to participate and all consented in writing to their actual names being used in reporting. The four youth participants were Steffany Lien, Olivia Calegan, Jayde Atkins, and McKenzie Steiner.

Steffany Lien, a high school senior, is a six-time world champion baton twirler. She also won the Grand National Championship, known as the "Contest of Contests" in elite twirling circles, Pre-Teen Miss Majorette of America, and Junior Miss Majorette of America. She is also Miss Nebraska's Outstanding Teen. Her mother, Susan Lien, and her primary coach, Bonnie Baxter, also participated.

Olivia Calegan is a high school junior. At age 12, she held the national age group record in the 50-yard breaststroke. She earned USA Olympic trial invitations in 2016 in the 50-meter freestyle and 100-meter breaststroke. At the time of her interview, she was ranked the fifth best American swimmer in her age group events and held five Nebraska individual or team records. Olivia's parents, Sue and Bob Calegan, participated, as did her swim club coach, Mike Witt, and her high school swim team coach, Leigh Ann Fetter-Witt.

Jayde Atkins is a high school senior. She won the national reined cow horse championship and was a qualifier in cutting, barrel racing, and pole bending in the national finals rodeo. Her parents and coaches, Sonya and J. B. Atkins, also participated.

McKenzie Steiner is a high school freshman. She is a songwriter, guitar player, and lead singer for the McKenzie Jalynn Band. She and her band recently recorded an album with Go Time Records in Nashville, TN. She was selected as Nebraska Country Music Foundation's top youth vocalist of the year three times and was inducted into the Junior Hall of Fame at age 11.

She is also an outstanding high school softball player. As a 9th grader, she played on her high school's varsity team and earned a letter. Her parents, Carrie and Scott Steiner, also participated. In addition, her high school softball coach, Mark Watt, and her bandmate and music mentor, Eric Toombs, participated.

Data Gathering

We conducted and recorded interviews (approximately 45–75 minutes each) in person with each youth, both her parents, and all relevant coaches. All interviews were conducted in 2015 or 2016. Each interview was conducted individually and privately except for parent partners, who were interviewed together. In keeping with a qualitative approach, participants first described their experiences with little direction from the interviewer (Creswell, 2007) by answering open-ended questions. For example, youth were asked: “Tell me how you got so good at (your respective talent domain).” Understanding that the existing literature (Kiewra et al., 2006) identifies practice, family influence, coaching, and centers of excellence as key components in talent development, follow-up questions probed more deeply with respect to those areas. For example: “How much time do you spend practicing?”

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis strategy consisted of two steps. First, we generated detailed descriptions of each of the four talented youths in order to tell their unique talent development stories. Next, we used a cross-case analysis approach (Yin, 1989) to identify the youths' talent development commonalities.

We began the data analysis procedure by reading through interview transcripts. We then notated each transcript using process coding (Saldaña, 2011). After coding, we compiled all the codes, eliminated any redundancy, and classified codes into similar clusters for analytic

reflection. We considered the study's research question, the possible connections among codes, and the emergent patterns in the analytic reflection. Finally, we identified prevailing themes.

Examples of codes, themes, and sample quotations appear in Table 1.

Results

The independent talent development stories of the four Nebraska youth are presented in turn. All direct quotations are from interviews.

Steffany Lien: Product of a Twirling Talent Trilogy

Steffany Lien is the product of a talent trilogy: student, parent, and coach coordinated their efforts to foster Steffany's talent. Steffany said, "I truly believe that it takes the right parent, the right coach, and a student who is willing to put in the work and time needed to excel. In my opinion, that's the recipe for success. That's how it happens." Steffany's coach echoed this belief. Coach Bonnie said,

You have to have a good balance of all three. It begins with a student who is passionate about her sport and who is motivated to excel. Part of that comes from the coach who is encouraging and inspiring, and part of that comes from the parent. So, it is a combination of all three. If one of those is missing, it is not going to happen.

Regarding Steffany's talent attributes, Coach Bonnie said,

Steffany is a complete joy to coach, but she is an exception. She is a very, very exceptional girl in so many ways. She is highly motivated and hardworking and has a lot of innate ability. Thus, she's extremely talented.

Steffany's mom, Susan, takes little credit for Steffany's drive and talent. Susan said, "I knew early on that Steffany was serious by her actions. I could see her drive and her potential. But, it wasn't imposed from me. It was within her."

Although the spark for Steffany's talent might have flared from within, there is little doubt that Steffany's mom fanned those flames from the start. Susan has been on the baton-twirling journey with Steffany since the beginning. Susan was a twirler as a child, so she introduced Steffany to twirling when Steffany was 4 years old by signing her up for a summer camp that included twirling, cheerleading, and gymnastic instruction. From this initial experience, Steffany gravitated to baton twirling. Steffany said, "I definitely knew then that I wanted to do baton twirling. I loved the feel of having the stick in my hand and being able to dance around with it. I have never lost that feeling."

When it comes to practice, Steffany practices almost every day and usually for several hours. Susan, meanwhile, is by her side throughout, watching, helping reset music and time routines, and offering advice. Susan said,

We sometimes spend five or six hours a day in the gym. Which is a lot. We usually split that time into two practices, so we're at the gym twice a day. Steffany practices most every day, so it's not the norm for us to skip a day. It is just part of our rhythm of the day to go to the gym and practice. Even on Christmas Eve, we figure out how we're going to get into some gym in the morning before it closes.

Steffany believes that her mom plays an instrumental role in twirling lessons and practice. In terms of lessons, Susan drives Steffany monthly from Lincoln to Topeka, Kansas, where the pair attends all-day lessons and spends the weekend. Steffany said,

My mom takes me to every single lesson. We drive about three and a half hours each way to work with my main coach and choreographer. We spend practically the whole weekend there. But, she never complains about it and she's really involved. She's always got her pen in her hand and is taking notes during the lesson. Little things my coach says

that could be easily missed, my mom writes down so that she can review those points with me (when we practice) later.

In terms of practices, Susan makes sure that Steffany practices as her coach directed. Steffany said, “During practice, my mom reinforces those lesson coaching tips and makes sure I practice as the coach intends.” Steffany also reported that her mom has a keen eye and can see things that Steffany needs to adjust while practicing. Steffany said,

My mom will sometimes watch me from off to the side and correct my patterns or spot errors that can result in point deductions. There are just a lot of little things that most people would never catch that she sees because she has been around for everything—all the lessons and training. She knows just what to look for.

Coach Bonnie recognizes the important contribution Susan has made to Steffany’s twirling development. Coach Bonnie said, “No child does it alone. There’s got to be parent support, encouragement, and nurturing. Susan does all this. She is what I consider the ideal mother.”

Part of what allows Susan to be so involved in Steffany’s twirling is their close and exclusive family dynamic. Steffany has no siblings and was raised by her mom. Steffany said, “Our family dynamic is very unique. It’s just my mom and me, and I really can’t imagine it any other way. It works out perfectly for us. I don’t know how we would be doing all that we are with lessons, practices, and competitions if there were more people in our immediate family.”

Steffany and Susan could not have realized twirling success without a top-flight coach, and they found one in Coach Bonnie, an experienced and accomplished coach who works with top twirling prospects. Susan recognized the need for an elite coach and gladly relinquished her early coaching hat to Coach Bonnie. Susan said, “I think one thing that I did correctly was that I

did not assume to be the coach. I put Steffany in Coach Bonnie's hands, trusted in that, and let go." Regarding Bonnie's coaching, Susan said,

They don't come any better than Coach Bonnie. We're very fortunate, very lucky to have her in our lives and not just as a coach. Beyond twirling, she has taught Steffany a great deal about how to be disciplined, how to be responsible and mature, and how to be gracious when she wins and gracious when she loses.

Along this same line, Steffany said, "I don't know what I would do without Coach Bonnie. She put me on this path and has made me strong both in technique and mental discipline."

Regarding technique, Coach Bonnie supplies Steffany with the fundamental and advanced technical knowledge needed to excel. She does this not by modeling twirling skills but by keen observation, analysis, and feedback. Steffany said,

Coach Bonnie took me back to the basics of twirling. She made sure that my wrist was in the right position and that all my individual moves were unified and on pattern. She focused on and adjusted all the little things that contribute to the overall effect.

Coach Bonnie said, "If you're going to teach someone to spell, you first have to teach them the alphabet. So, I am strict and diligent when it comes to teaching good, strong basics, a good foundation." Regarding her teaching methods, Coach Bonnie said,

I don't have to get out there and spin for her. Instead, I give her the knowledge she needs to internalize the move and do the move herself. I watch and analyze. I might say, "That trick is not working because the baton's off-balance. The baton has to have a certain balance." Or, I'll say, "That trick is not working because you're moving too slowly. It won't work at that speed. You've got to double your speed." I pass along knowledge.

When Steffany won yet another National Championship in 2016 in South Bend, Indiana, just before departing to the University of Louisville to become their featured twirler, both Susan and Coach Bonnie were there to support Steffany and share in her success—a shared success that Susan said might have just as easily gone in another direction:

If Steffany and I had not been on this journey together, we would have been on another one together. I think she and I both have a kind of personality type where when we do something, we do it all out. If she and I commit to something, just get out of the way because we're committed to succeed. And, it's not just twirling; it's anything that we do. If we commit, we're all in.

Olivia Calegan: A Swimmer with All Hands On Deck

Olivia Calegan has the perfect support structure for success: a supportive swimming family, strong coaching, and a center of excellence swim environment. When it comes to Olivia's swimming success, all hands are on the pool deck.

Olivia was born into a swimming family. Both of her older brothers are former state high school champions and were accomplished collegiate swimmers. Olivia's father, Robert, said, "Both her brothers were swimmers, so Olivia grew up always going to their swim meets and hanging around the swim program." Olivia said, "It wouldn't have even crossed my mind to start swimming if it weren't for my brothers. They're the reason I got involved in the sport." Olivia, though, eventually surpassed her swimming brothers and became the best of the bunch. Robert, said, "Our oldest was great. The next was just that much better. Olivia, though, has really taken it to a whole new level." Olivia's mother, Sue, concurs. She said,

Olivia's been more successful in the pool than her brothers, but I think a lot of that comes from watching them as she was growing up. Olivia became a natural at swimming because of her exposure to it at such a young age. Her brothers were great role models.

Olivia's father has been especially involved in her talent development as both swimming club administrator and self-taught swim coach. Robert said,

I was always there during Olivia's practices so I figured I would become more involved. I became vice president of her swim club and eventually president. But the more I was around the practices, the more I felt like I could contribute more, so I started coaching Olivia's team.

Robert was not a swimmer himself but a former runner. He relied on his running background to help his swimmers "get their bodies in shape." He took classes to learn the technical side of swimming and relied on assistant coaches to foster technique. Over time, Robert won several top-coaching awards.

At first, Robert coached around his day job. He coached in the evenings, on weekends, and in the mornings before work. Eventually, he became a full-time club coach. Robert said, "I tried to maintain my day job but little by little my life transitioned more into coaching than my day job could handle. So, when an opportunity arose to coach a couple clubs, including Olivia's, in our geographic area, I quit my human resources job and became a full-time swim coach."

Robert and his family eventually moved from Iowa to Lincoln, Nebraska, and Robert returned to working in the field of human resources. Before moving to Lincoln, Robert checked out the community and high school swim programs to make sure that Olivia would be part of a strong swimming community. Robert said,

When I came to interview for my job, I made it a priority to know what was available in the community swimming-wise. I interviewed coaches in the area to see what their abilities were. I had turned down a lot of good jobs in the past because they were not in places with strong swimming communities.

Within six months of taking the new position in Lincoln, a coaching position opened in Olivia's eventual high school and Robert took the position while maintaining his new job. Robert said,

I asked the folks I just started working with if they would support my coaching in the mornings and evenings, which involved leaving work a little early and making up work time at night or on weekends, and they supported it.

Back in coaching, Robert was coaching about 40 hours a week in addition to his regular job hours. He coached the high school team for three years, including Olivia's first two years in high school, and guided the team to a state title. After that, Robert turned the coaching position over to a more highly qualified coach but continued his involvement as a volunteer coach working behind the scenes and staying closely involved with Olivia's swimming development.

Robert admits that he and his family made sacrifices to support Olivia's swimming.

Robert said,

Sacrifice is definitely what comes to mind when I think of competitive swimming. My wife, Sue, and I complain that we don't have enough time and money. I've had to cut my salary by a third and be gone every morning, evening, and weekend. I'm not saying that to have a champion or Olympian that you have to give up everything, but there is a lot of sacrifice, and we've maybe taken it way beyond what a normal family would do.

Olivia has prospered from her father's coaching and from that of her present club and high school coaches, Mike and Leigh Ann Witt (who are married). Mike and Leigh Ann both

coach the club team, and Leigh Ann coaches the high school team. Mike has coached swimming for more than 30 years on youth, college, and Olympic levels. Leigh Ann was a 15-time All-American swimmer at the University of Texas. She finished fifth in the 1988 Olympics in the 50-meter freestyle, which is one of Olivia's main events. What Olivia has gained most from her coaches are a focus on technique and the ability to push and train at the highest level. Regarding technique, Coach Mike said,

A lot of coaches think they have to make their swimmers swim great distances to prepare to race. I don't find that practice makes perfect but that perfect practice makes perfect. I stress working on the small technical details. For instance, when I started coaching Olivia, I saw that she sometimes dropped her elbow and would just slide through the water and not get the catch she needed to generate speed. So, I coached her to make little corrections that made her more efficient and faster.

Coach Leigh Ann said,

I focus on the little stroke technique things like the pitch of the hand and the height of the elbow. Little things make a big difference. I try to use my swimming background to paint a picture for my swimmers of what a good stroke feels like.

About high-level training, Coach Mike said,

I also have to move swimmers to the point where they are fatigued and start to fall apart because it is at that point that they must learn to maintain form and technique. This is how they're going to feel when racing, so it's important to replicate that stress and fatigue in practice.

Coach Leigh Ann said much the same:

I ask them every day to go all out full speed off the blocks. The higher the intensity, the more their muscles start building up lactic acid and making them tie up and get sore until they feel like they can't lift their arms above their head. They're constantly building up that lactic acid in practice and trying to recover from that and overcome that so when they race they'll be able to swim through that fatigue and pain even when they feel like they just can't go another stroke. Our practice routine moves them outside their comfort zone. They learn to keep pushing on when they feel like they can't go any more. Doing that makes good athletes great athletes.

Olivia's development is also fueled by her being part of a strong swim environment with elite coaches and teammates. As already mentioned, Leigh Ann Witt directs Olivia's high school team, Lincoln Southwest, and Leigh Ann and Mike Witt direct her club team, Greater Nebraska Swim Team. These girls' teams have had considerable success and attract other top swimmers who push Olivia in practice. Southwest High School has been undefeated in meets since 2011 and has won state championships in 2014, 2016, and 2017. Greater Nebraska Swim Team is the premiere swim club in Nebraska (USA Swimming, 2016), and many of its swimmers earn athletic scholarships to colleges with top swimming programs.

Regarding the benefits of Olivia practicing with a cohort of talented swimmers, her father said,

To have Olivia (and two teammates who are all multiple state champions) swimming for the same club is quite amazing because they truly are three of the top swimmers for their age in the country. They practice well together and really push each other every day in practice.

Speaking about the same swimming teammates, Coach Leigh Ann said,

All three of them have Olympic Trial cuts so it's rare to have so much talent on the same club team. All three have different personalities, but they come together and just get along well. They push each other day in and day out in practice. They progress as a group. Their competition and growth is like a snowball rolling downhill. When one accomplishes something new, the others say, "Well, if she's doing that, then I can, too. I'm going with her." They're a very driven group.

Speaking about her teammates, Olivia said, "We're like a family, but we really push each other. It's a friendly competition but intense."

Olivia's dedication and all-hands-on-deck support from family, coaches, and teammates helped her realize one of her chief goals of competing in the 2016 Olympic Trials. Once there, she said, "I think every kid growing up dreams of something like this."

Jayde Atkins: Product of a One-Horse Talent Hotbed

Broken Bow is a tiny rural town in central Nebraska. Its population is just 3,600. The surrounding area is dotted with sprawling farms and ranches. About five miles from town is the Atkins' ranch, a one-horse talent hotbed. There, on or near that ranch, was everything that Jayde Atkins needed to become a rodeo national champion.

The ranch is well equipped for rodeo training. There are acres of riding land; a large training pen that simulates a rodeo arena; an array of training apparatus such as saddles, mechanical calves, and rodeo barrels; and a stately horse barn. In that horse barn are the prized horses that Jayde trains and rides in competitions. The ranch is the perfect rodeo talent breeding ground, and it was planted and cultivated by Jayde's parents and coaches, J. B. and Sonya Atkins.

Living on a ranch far from the bustle of city life and living a lifestyle that revolves around horse training and riding was always a priority for the Atkins family. J. B. said,

Through my job as a sales manager, we've had the opportunity to live in a lot of different places, but the reason we chose to live where we do is that we wanted the kids to grow up in the type of rural environment that made me successful and to pass that along to them. Meanwhile, my wife's done some great things with horses, so we kind of had a lot of things in place for this to work out for Jayde.

Sonya said,

We have a small acreage, and my husband and I have both competed in various horse events in the rodeo and horse-showing worlds. We are also professional trainers who give riding lessons to the public. Our kids have just kind of grown up around that and been on horseback from the start. Jayde has always had a pony or something to ride since she could walk, and it's just always been part of her lifestyle. I have pictures in my mind of her galloping up the hill, bareback on a horse, and me thinking, "She's really too young for this." But she wasn't because she was just laughing and giggling and having a ball. Jayde's always been kind of a horse crazy girl and, of course, I encouraged it.

Jayde recognizes that she has had the ideal talent development training ground. She said, "I've had the perfect set-up and foundation for success. I should be good."

Another important environmental element linked to Jayde's success is the rodeo events held throughout Nebraska where Jayde tests her training and skills against competitors. This means that the Atkins' rodeo team, horses, and equipment must load up the trailer and mobilize.

Sonya said,

We travel to about 26 rodeos a year, and they're scattered in small towns all over Nebraska. On a typical rodeo weekend, we might go to Hyannis one day and then to Arthur the next, and there'll be a couple hundred kids competing at each. The places we go, there are no hotels and usually no food. That's why we now have a trailer with living quarters. Before that, though, we just slept on mattresses stuck into the nose of our old trailer, and there was no electricity or running water.

Regarding that early trailer and the horses they carried, J. B. offered this perspective:

For years, we rodeoed in a 20-year old trailer—not the fanciest thing to pull into the rodeo grounds—because we were focused on the horses we were carrying in that trailer. We see people put their priorities on the wrong thing. They have a trailer that costs more than the horses they put inside it. We did it the other way around. The horses we were loading in our trailer were considerably more expensive. Our priorities are Jayde's safety, the horseflesh she's competing on, and hard work. Some of the best cowboys I know show up in the worst trailers, but they've got the other three things right.

Jayde's parents have coached Jayde from the start in how to train and ride horses. Most of the coaching has occurred naturally as the family works together toward developing their horses and improving technique. Sonya said,

Jayde's never had a formal lesson from either of us. It's just been hit or miss as the family rides horses and practices whatever, such as calf roping or barrel racing in the arena. We watch her and offer advice as needed. "Maybe you should have done this or that, and that would have made it better." We don't take the time to teach her a five-step method or how to do a certain maneuver because she has always been around correct

riding and how to handle horses. We kind of expect her to know a lot just from being around it so much.

Still, her parents stress hard work and fundamentals as keys to success. J. B. said,

Success doesn't come about by accident. It comes about through good old-fashioned hard work. And, we don't learn hard work by accident. It's a learned behavior that comes from fundamentals, fundamental, fundamentals. Every event you do has fundamentals, and Jayde's ability to discern and master those fundamentals dictates how successful she'll be.

Jayde has embodied this training perspective. She said,

What makes me better than others is my dedication. Some kids do rodeo socially, to make friends, and say, "I'm a cowboy or a cowgirl." But, I think of this more as a job. I have my goals and know that if I want to achieve them, I must work hard and sacrifice. You have to sacrifice if you want to be the best.

Jayde does just that. She practices until dark every day after school and practices five to six hours every day throughout the summer.

Sonya is closely involved as Jayde practices. She described a typical practice session this way:

Today, for example, Jayde's going to want to run her barrel horse, Slim. So, she'll warm him up, set up barrels, and do some drills. Meanwhile, I'll exercise one of her other horses. When Jayde finishes with Slim, I'll cool him down while Jayde next rides her cow horse and practices some calf roping. After that, Slim is rested and she'll take another run on him. We trade off that way. Also, sometimes Jayde gets frustrated with

something her horse is doing and can't see what to do to fix it. So, we'll switch horses and I'll ride the horse, tell her what I feel, and what she might try.

Jayde's parents also film Jayde's practices and competitions and provide pointed feedback for improvement when needed. Sonya said,

We don't try to pamper her. When we notice that she is messing up, we don't let her get by with it. We hammer on the problem and say, "You think you're doing this right but you're not. Here, watch the video and see for yourself."

That sort of accountability has helped Jayde own her mistakes and figure things out on her own.

Jayde recounted one such lesson learned through self-analysis. She said,

During competition, I thought my horse was looking awful so I jerked him. I watched the video later and I thought, "Why am I jerking him, he looks great." Being a perfectionist, I want to find and fix all the problems. I learned from my dad, "Focus on the problem; fix the problem."

Jayde recognizes the important roles her parents have played and the sacrifices made for her to become a champion. She said, "My parents are my role models. They are older than me and wiser than me, and they've sacrificed a lot for me to do this." Sonya added,

There have been sacrifices. J. B. and I put our own competitions on hold. There are horses, feed, facilities, land payments, insurance, vehicles, a trailer, and travel. There is no end to it. But, it's fair to say that we never saw this coming. We never intended to raise a champion. I remember Jayde just sitting in the bleachers for years watching and waiting her turn. And, when she finally did get to compete, we were amazed how successful she was. But, when you study it, we shouldn't be surprised. She was plotting

and planning and working toward this. And, she had what she needed to succeed right here at home.

McKenzie Steiner: A Father-Influenced Music and Softball Double Play

Remember the rare two-sport athlete Bo Jackson? People would say, “Bo knows football, and Bo knows baseball.” Well, McKenzie Steiner knows softball and singing, too. She too is a two-talent star—a softball-and-music double play. Standing behind McKenzie’s success is her band assembler, music promoter, and softball coach: Scott Steiner, McKenzie’s father.

Inspired by her sister, McKenzie started playing softball when she was 6 years old.

McKenzie said,

I watched my older sister play softball for a really long time and thought it would be something really good for me to try. I always looked up to her as a role model, and both she and my dad helped a lot with me becoming a pitcher.

Regarding that early family influence, Scott said,

McKenzie’s older sister was really athletic and really good at softball. Our family would travel the country and watch her play. So, McKenzie was practically raised on a softball field, and I think her love of the game came from that.

But, it was Scott who coached McKenzie from the beginning. Scott said,

I’ve been one of her team coaches ever since she started playing. It’s club softball, so we practice year-round and travel and play about 100 games a year. In addition, McKenzie and I used to practice her pitching in the backyard all the time. And, for 90% of her career, I’ve called pitches for her in games. It was only when she started playing high school ball that I stepped back from that role. McKenzie also works with a local pitching coach in the off-season, but I continue to practice with her year-round.

McKenzie's year-round softball playing was rewarded when she made her high school's varsity team as a freshman pitcher and outfielder. Her varsity coach, Mark Watt, said that a freshman contributing to the varsity team is a rare occurrence and happens about once every few years. Coach Watt was impressed with McKenzie's freshman season and potential. He said,

By the end of the season, McKenzie was starting every day and hitting extremely well. I think she ended up third in batting average for our team, and that's an impressive year for anyone. McKenzie has Division 1 college softball talent. She has good speed and is powerful for someone that doesn't look like she'd be real strong. But hitting isn't all about muscling up and trying to rip the ball that way. It's about coordination, timing, and good mechanics; she's got those tools. McKenzie came in for extra hitting lessons and got better and better. She also knows how to use her body and is an intelligent player. I know she's been a top pitcher for several years, and she also did a great job for us on the mound in her first season.

Regarding the role McKenzie's parents have played in her growth, Coach Watt said,

They've done a great job helping McKenzie develop confidence and helping her put herself out there as much as she does. I've heard her band play and it's highly impressive that a 14-year old can perform with adults professionally. There are not many kids that can do that successfully. I think that McKenzie's confidence and ability comes from her parents. They have done a great job supporting her. Her father started that music group and found very talented people to be in it. For softball, he's coached her team, developed her pitching skills, and called pitches. He guided McKenzie's older sister, who was also a pitcher, in the same way.

Scott Steiner admits that he has no singing talent, but he believes that it was his joy for singing that sparked McKenzie's joy for singing as well. He said,

I honestly think that she probably learned to love singing as a child from listening to me singing in the car. She saw me being happy with it. And occasionally I'd hear her singing in the back and think, "Wow, she's really good."

Recognizing McKenzie's joy and talent for singing, Scott began to prompt her to sing more. When McKenzie was 6, he provided McKenzie with a karaoke machine that she and her older sister used to make a 12-song CD. However, McKenzie was shy about singing publicly, so Scott arranged for McKenzie to sing to family from behind a wall where she could not be seen and eventually could step out into view. Scott said,

She went from singing in the backseat, to the shower and her room, but she was scared to sing in public. One night, I got her to sing from behind a wall to her cousin, her mom, and me sitting in the living room. She sang a song and did a great job. I said, "Sing another song and as you finish, step out into the opening where you can see us." She did, and after that, she sang another song in the living room, but we were not allowed to look at her. And, we're all laughing and having fun with this. I said, "Okay, this time we get to watch you sing." We did, and she said that it felt "pretty good" and sang us another song. She sang all night.

After that, Scott took McKenzie to a small-town bowling alley bar and grill to sing karaoke on a weeknight. Scott said,

There were just a few people in the place, but McKenzie was really nervous about singing. After the bartender sang a song to get things rolling, McKenzie took the mic next and started singing. People perked up and listened, and people from the bowling alleys

came in and listened, too. She loved it. We returned there that weekend for a contest and the parking lot was packed. But McKenzie sang and did great—even won the contest.

She was so excited that night. And that really began her singing career.

Next came the band, and Scott was the one who hatched the idea and largely assembled the four-piece band. Scott said, “The band took two years to build, and I built it around McKenzie as lead singer.” His first thought was to form a youth band, so he placed ads for youth musicians on Craig’s List. Eventually he decided to form a more conventional and professional band after hearing from Eric, a talented 25-year-old drummer, who loved music and wanted to join McKenzie as a way of giving back to younger musicians the way older musicians once mentored him. Together, Scott, McKenzie, and Eric interviewed and auditioned prospective members until the McKenzie JaLynn Band was formed when McKenzie was just 14.

Eric and the other members have been instrumental in guiding McKenzie’s development. McKenzie’s mother, Carrie, said,

We couldn’t be more thankful for the band members. Eric’s been with us from the start, and he’s a great mentor to McKenzie. He said that his main goal from the beginning was to never let McKenzie make the same mistakes he did along the way.

Regarding that goal, Eric said,

I try to steer her in the right direction, make sure she stays on course, like the bumpers alongside a bowling alley. McKenzie is like a little sister to me, and I know the other band members feel the same way.

McKenzie, too, particularly credits Eric for directing her music, pushing her to try new songs and non-lead parts, and for teaching her life lessons. McKenzie said, “Everybody in the band has

taught me so much, and I really enjoy playing with them. Eric teaches a lot of life lessons through the stories he tells, and I really enjoy listening to them.”

Regarding life lessons and McKenzie’s potential, Eric said,

There’s things you can learn from teachers and there’s things you can learn from smoky bars. Some stuff you just can’t learn by paying someone to teach you. So, McKenzie is doing a lot of what she needs to be doing—playing four-hour shows, staying out late, and seeing that music is backbreaking work. I try to get her to understand that a lot of times you don’t make money and you don’t get recognition, but you do it because it’s a labor of love. And, McKenzie does it for that reason. She has the ingredients for succeeding. She is a great singer and songwriter and has a never-ending desire to continue doing this whether it’s in her basement, on a street corner, opening for a big name, or if she becomes the big name.

Since the band’s formation, they have performed regularly in local and regional venues mostly because of Scott’s work as promoter. He maintains a website showcasing McKenzie and the band’s experiences, and he works to book new shows. Eric said,

Scott’s biggest role now is booking shows for us, and he’s really good at it. He gets nothing for doing this, and it’s so much work. But, he loves and believes in the band and wants to hear us play. What I like best about Scott, as a promoter, is that he is a dreamer. He wants us to play the Pinnacle Bank Arena (in Lincoln, Nebraska) and other big arenas. I love that because such optimism keeps you looking ahead.

Scott’s promotion and the band’s notoriety have already paid large dividends. McKenzie was invited to audition for the hit TV show *The Voice* (which she is considering for another time), and the band just cut its first album in Nashville under the guidance of Kent Wells, who is best

known as Dolly Parton's lead guitarist and record producer. Scott concluded, "The sky is the limit for McKenzie. Whatever McKenzie sets for a goal, I never doubt because she's reached every one of them (in both softball and music)."

Discussion

Four stories about talented Nebraska youth were told. There was Steffany who excelled in baton twirling largely because of the interplay among student, parent, and coach. There was Olivia who excelled in swimming largely because of family involvement, elite coaching, and a strong swimming environment. There was Jayde who excelled at rodeo largely because her parents provided an optimal and natural home environment for developing rodeo skills. Finally, there was McKenzie who excelled in both softball and music largely because of her father's encompassing roles in both. Although the four stories of talented Nebraska youth reveal varying talent paths across varying talent domains, each interesting and important, we offer a collective cross-case examination that reveals five talent development commonalities among the four Nebraska youth (that link to the four talent factors reviewed in the introduction): hard work (deliberate practice), a focus on fundamentals (deliberate practice and accomplished coaching), an already established family link to the talent domain (family influence), extraordinary parent involvement (family influence), and environment building (family influence and center of excellence).

Hard Work

It comes as no surprise that all the talented Nebraska youth are hard workers. Steffany practices twirling nearly every day—even Christmas Eve. She often practices twice a day and practices five to six hours a day. Olivia's high-intensity training is designed to build body-cramping lactic acid and make her strokes falter as stamina wanes. Jayde rodeo trains until dark

every day after school and for five or six hours a day in the summer. McKenzie practices and plays softball throughout the year—a hundred games a year. Her softball coach credits her hard work ethic and extra batting practice sessions for her making the varsity team as a freshman. On the music side, she rehearses every day and stays out late playing four-hour shows because it is a labor of love. In summary, the talented individuals engage in arduous and deliberate practice (also see Ericsson, 2002).

Focus on Fundamentals

Like most talented individuals, the four talented Nebraska youth do not just practice hard; they practice well. They focus on technique. Steffany was already an accomplished twirler when Coach Bonnie took over and stressed basics and rebuilding a strong foundation. Steffany's mom does, too, as she records the coach's technical tips during lessons and reinforces those techniques when she observes Steffany practicing. Olivia's father, Robert, studied swimming technique in order to teach her and other swimmers he coached proper technique. Olivia's swim coaches contend that perfect practice makes perfect. They emphasize the catch and repair of small technical stroke errors—a dropped elbow or misaligned hand—that left unchecked cause a big performance drop. Jayde learned the technical aspects of horse training and riding more through parent observation than through direct instruction. Still, her parent coaches stress fundamentals and hammer on those fundamentals when they see a problem. McKenzie's softball practice also emphasizes mechanics. Her softball coach credits her batting power to her excellent timing acquired during extra hitting instruction. For years, McKenzie's father helped her practice the intricacies of pitching. In music, McKenzie's band mate pushes her outside her comfort zone, leading her to practice new things such as non-lead parts and songs that challenge her. In summary, the talented individuals are led by accomplished coaches and parents who stress

fundamentals during deliberate practice (also see Kiewra & Witte, 2015; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006).

An Established Family Link to Talent Domain

All four talented Nebraska youth had previously established family links to their talent domains. Steffany's mom was a former twirler, as were three of the four mothers of talented twirlers that Kiewra and Witte (2015) studied. Olivia's older brothers and father paved the way for her swimming success. Each brother won state high school championships and competed for college swim teams. Her father was a swim coach. Both of Jayde's parents were professional horse and riding trainers who also competed. McKenzie grew up in a softball family. She and her family traveled extensively to watch her talented older sister play softball. McKenzie's father was a longtime softball coach. McKenzie's music involvement did not seemingly stem from a family connection other than her father's casual love of singing. In summary, family influence jumpstarted each talented individual on her eventual talent path (also see Ott Schacht & Kiewra, 2016; Piirto, 1995).

Extraordinary Parent Involvement

One of Benjamin Bloom's (1985) conclusions was that it is not enough for the child to commit to the talent area; parents must commit as well. In the present study, baton coach Bonnie Baxter echoed Bloom's conclusion. She said, "No child does it alone. There's got to be parent support, encouragement, and nurturing." In the present study, we saw even more than parent support and commitment, we saw extraordinary parent involvement.

Steffany's mom, Susan, led Steffany's baton twirling journey since she introduced Steffany to twirling at age 4. Susan hired an elite coach. She attended all competitions throughout the U.S. and around the world, lessons (more than 3 hours away), and daily practices,

but did more than observe. Susan noted the coach's technical advice and helped Steffany incorporate that advice during practice. Susan emphasized the mother–daughter twirling partnership when she said, “If Steffany and I had not been on this journey together, we would have been on another one together... If she and I commit to something, get out of the way because we're all in.”

Olivia's father, Robert, has been there with Olivia every swim stroke of the way. Robert was Olivia's primary coach for club swimming throughout her youth and was later her high school coach. Oftentimes, Robert's coaching came as a 40-hour-per-week addition to his regular job. There were times when Robert literally quit his day job and coached swimming full time. When the family moved from Iowa, Robert's main priority in choosing a new home was one where there was a strong swimming community.

Jayde's parents, Sonya and J. B., bought a ranch in rural Nebraska so they could raise their children around horse training and riding. Both parents had backgrounds in these areas. They passed their horse knowledge and passion naturally onto Jayde, who also grew to love horse training and riding. As Jayde grew more serious about rodeo competition, her parents took on the roles of training partners and coaches. Jayde and her parents together trained and conditioned the competition horses. When Jayde rode in practice or competition, her parents offered critical feedback that helped Jayde develop her riding talents.

McKenzie's father, Scott, was instrumental in developing McKenzie's softball and singing talents. Scott introduced McKenzie to softball and coached her year-round club teams up until high school. In addition, Scott worked individually with McKenzie, particularly on her pitching, and called McKenzie's game pitches. Scott introduced McKenzie to the joys of singing, noticed her early talent, and arranged singing opportunities to gradually draw McKenzie from

her confidence-limiting shell. It was also Scott who painstakingly assembled a band around McKenzie and then managed and promoted the band.

In summary, parents did more than influence their talented children. They went to extraordinary lengths to develop their talent (also see Bloom, 1985; Davidson et al., 1996; Witte et al., 2015).

Environment Building

Talented individuals usually grow up in talent hotbeds or gravitate to them (Ott Schacht & Kiewra, 2016; Witte, et al., 2015). Sometimes, parents help create a center of excellence for their talented child. Such was the case for another Nebraska child raised in an area with few chess resources (Root, 2016). In the present study, Nebraska parents were resourceful in identifying critical components needed to build a strong environment for talent development.

Steffany grew up in a community undistinguished for baton twirling. Steffany's mom, Susan, overcame this environmental barrier by traveling with Steffany three and a half hours each way for lessons in Topeka, Kansas, where Steffany could train with an elite coach. Susan also traveled extensively with Steffany to the best competitions throughout the U.S. and around the world. Finally, Susan secured daily gym space for hours at a time so that Steffany had an ideal practice environment. Olivia's father, Robert, was instrumental in building strong club and school programs for Olivia by taking on time-consuming coaching and administrative roles. He also relocated his family to Lincoln, Nebraska, largely because Lincoln had strong club and high school swim teams. Jayde's parents bought a ranch in rural Nebraska where they created the ideal rodeo training environment for Jayde. The family had ideal facilities, well-bred horses, and proximity to rodeo competitions. McKenzie grew up in a community not well distinguished for softball or country music. Her father, Scott, though, helped improve the softball community

through his coaching role. Moreover, he and McKenzie's team traveled extensively throughout the U.S. to compete against elite teams. In terms of country music, Scott fostered McKenzie's environment by building a band with whom she could practice and perform. Scott also expanded McKenzie's geographic influence by setting up shows in other states and by arranging for the band to cut an album in Nashville. In summary, these Nebraska parents created or bettered their talented children's environment, making it a center of excellence (see also Kiewra & Witte, 2013; Witte et al., 2015).

The Role of Schools in Talent Development

Although school involvement was not a focus of the present study, a few observations about school involvement emerged. In each case, the talented youth's school played a role in talent development, but the role was secondary to the home experience, occurred well after talent was developed in the home, and was sometimes more one of display than growth. Twirler Steffany Lien was the featured twirler for her high school's marching band, but Steffany's twirling skills were already well established before high school, and the band experience simply afforded another opportunity to showcase her skills. Rodeo star Jayde Atkins competed under her school's name at national competitions, but rodeo was a club sport in her high school, and participants practiced independently of the school. Schools played a bigger role in furthering the athletic talents of Steiner in softball and Calegan in swimming. Although both were products of strong home and club training throughout their youths, both were also aided by successful high school programs run by talented and knowledgeable coaches.

In our own research encompassing dozens of talented youth in a variety of talent domains (Kiewra et al., 2006; Kiewra & Witte, 2013; Ott Schacht & Kiewra, 2016), we have found only a few cases where talent was initiated in a school setting. For the most part, schools are mere

spectators on the talent sidelines. They provide all students with a general education that stresses intellectual skills—particularly language and logic—rather than emphasize or foster talents in other areas such as the arts (Gardner, 1993; Robinson, 2009). Until schools alter their approach, as was done by a Danish municipality that provided talent classes (Rasmussen & Rasmussen, 2015), a Canadian school that offered a talent in the arts program (Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai, 2013), and a Franklin, Mississippi school and community that joined forces to teach children chess (Dodd, 2017), talent development will remain largely the province of parents.

Parenting Implications

The present and previous studies (e.g., Côté & Hay, 2002; Witte et al., 2015) suggest that parents play a critical role in talent development. Accordingly, we offer two central parent recommendations for developing children's talent.

1. *Display your passions and talents.* Children are influenced by their parents' passions and talents, so parents should put these on display during children's formative years.

According to Piirto (1995), talent is perpetuated in families. For example, actors breed actors (e.g., the Fondas, Redgraves, and Sheens) and athletes breed athletes (e.g., the Ripkins, Bonds, and Unsers). Parent involvement in a talent area opened talent doors for all four Nebraska youth.

2. *Live the life.* Parents of talented children go to great lengths and make sacrifices to support their child's emerging talent. Family life revolves around their child and the talent area. Robert Calegan quit his day job to coach his daughter, Olivia, in swimming. The Atkins family lives the horse training and rodeo lifestyle. Parents should not stand idly on the sidelines but live the life associated with the talent domain.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Olivia Calegan, the five-time state record holder swimmer featured at the outset, and the other three talented Nebraska youth developed their talents because they were raised in families that had established roots in the talent area and who fostered environments conducive to talent development. They also developed talent because they worked hard and practiced parent- and coach-stressed fundamentals. Finally, their parents went to extraordinary lengths to guide and manage the talent journey. Without such environmental conditions operating, children are unlikely to develop talent.

References

- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 13*, 544–559. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss4/2/>
- Bloom, B. (1985). *Developing talent in young people*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Brustad, R. J. (1993). Who will go out and play? Parental and psychological influences on children's attraction to physical activity. *Pediatric Exercise Science, 5*, 210–223.
- Colvin, G. (2008). *Talent is overrated*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Côté, J. (1999). The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport. *The Sport Psychologist, 13*, 395–417.
- Côté, J., & Hay, J. (2002). Family influences on youth sport performance and participation. In J. M. Silva & D. E. Stevens (Eds.), *Psychological foundations of sport* (pp. 503–519). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2016). *Thirty essential skills for the qualitative researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York, NY: Harper.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., Rathunde, K., & Whalen, S. (1993). *Talented teenagers*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

- Czajkowski, Z. (2010). Coach's work, knowledge, skills, and personality. *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism, 17*, 131–137.
- Davidson, J. W., Howe, M. J. A., Moore, D. G., & Sloboda, J. A. (1996). The role of parental influences in the development of musical performance. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 14*, 399–412.
- Dodd, L. (Segment Producer). (2017). The attack in Garland, fake news, chess country [Television series episode]. In J. Fager (Executive Producer), *60 Minutes*. New York, NY: CBC News.
- Ericsson, K. A. (2002). Attaining excellence through deliberate practice: Insights from the study of expert performance. In M. Ferrari (Ed.), *The pursuit of excellence in education* (pp. 21–55). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Römer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review, 100*, 363–406.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.100.3.363>
- Ericsson, K. A., & Pool, R. (2016). *Peak: Secrets from the science of expertise*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Feldman, D. H. (Ed.). (1982). *Developmental approaches to giftedness and creativity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gardner, H. (1993). *Creating minds*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gaztambide-Fenández, R., Saifer, A., & Desai, C. (2013). “Talent” and the misrecognition of social advantage in specialized arts education. *Roeper Review, 35*, 124–135.
- Goldstein, T. R., & Winner, E. (2009). Living in alternative and inner worlds: Early signs of acting talent. *Creativity Research Journal, 21*, 117–124.

- Hambrick, D. Z., Oswald, F. L., Altmann, E. M., Meinz, E. J., Gobet, F., & Campitelli, G. (2014). Deliberate practice: Is that all it takes to become an expert? *Intelligence*, *45*, 34–45.
- Harwood, C. G., Douglas, J., & Minniti, A. M. (2012). Talent development: The role of the family. In S. Murphy (Ed.), *Handbook of sport and performance psychology* (pp. 476–492). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Hayes, J. R. (1985). Three problems in teaching problem solving skills. In S. Chipman & R. Glaser (Eds.), *Thinking and learning skills* (pp. 391–405). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hellstedt, J. C. (1987). The coach/parent/athlete relationship. *Sport Psychologist*, *1*, 151–160.
- Hill, A. P., MacNamara, Á, & Collins, D. (2015). Psychobehaviorally based features of effective talent development in rugby union: A coach's perspective. *The Sport Psychologist*, *29*, 201–212.
- Kiewra, K. A., O'Connor, T., McCrudden, M., & Liu, X. (2006). Developing young chess masters: A collective case study. In T. Redman (Ed.), *Chess in education: Selected essays from the Koltanowski conference* (pp. 98–108). Richardson, TX: The University of Texas at Dallas Chess Program.
- Kiewra, K. A., & Witte, A. L. (2013). How to parent chess talent: Classic and modern stories. In M. Shaughnessy (Ed.), *The development of talents, skills, and abilities* (pp. 139–162). Hauppauge, NY: NOVA Science.
- Kiewra, K. A., & Witte, A. L. (2015). How to parent baton twirling talent: Four success stories. *Talent Development And Excellence*, *7*, 13–27.
- MacKinnon, D. W. (1964). The creativity of architects. In C.W. Taylor (Ed.), *Widening horizons in creativity* (pp. 359–378). New York, NY: John Wiley.

- Morgan, T. K., & Giacobbi, P. R. (2006). Toward two grounded theories of the talent development and social support process of highly successful collegiate athletes. *The Sport Psychologist, 20*, 295–313.
- Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (2008). The role of the family in talent development. In S. I. Pfeiffer (Ed.), *Handbook of giftedness in children* (pp. 53–70). New York, NY: Springer.
- Ott Schacht, C., & Kiewra, K. A. (2016). *The fastest humans on earth: Environmental influences that spark talent development in Olympic speed skaters*. Evanston, IL: Midwestern Educational Research Association.
- Piirto, J. (1995). [Deeper and broader: The pyramid of talent development in the context of a giftedness construct](#). *The Educational Forum, 59*(4), 363–370.
- Rasmussen, A., & Rasmussen, P. (2015). Conceptions of student talent in the context of talent development. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 28*(4), 476-495.
doi: 10.1080/09518398.2014.916013
- Renzulli, J. (1978). What makes giftedness? Re-examining a definition. *Phi Delta Kappan, 60*, 180–184.
- Robinson, K. (2009). *The element: How finding your passion changes everything*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Root, A., (2016, October). Researching chess prodigies: An interview with Dr. Kenneth Kiewra. *Chess Base*. Retrieved from <https://en.chessbase.com/post/researching-chess-prodigies-an-interview-with-dr-kenneth-kiewra>.
- Saldaña, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of qualitative research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Sanchez, E. N., Aujla, I. J., & Nordin-Bates, S. (2013). Cultural background variables in dance talent development: Findings from the UK centres for advanced training. *Research in Dance Education, 14*, 260–278. doi: 10.1080/14647893.2012.712510
- Sloboda, J. A., & Howe, M. J. A. (1991). Biographical precursors of musical excellence: an interview study. *Psychology of Music, 19*, 3–21.
- Stake, R. E. (2013). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Stanley, J. C., & Benbow, C. P. (1986). Youths who reason exceptionally well mathematically. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness* (pp. 361-387). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Subotnik, R. F., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., & Worrell, F. C. (2011). Rethinking giftedness and gifted education: A proposed direction forward based on psychological science. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 12(1)*, 3–54.
- Syed, M. (2010). *Bounce*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Weissensteiner, J., Abernethy, B., Farrow, D., & Muller, S. (2008). The development of anticipation: A cross-sectional examination of the practice experiences contributing to skill in cricket batting. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 30*, 663–684.
- Witte, A. L., Kiewra, K. A., Kasson, S. C., Perry, K. R. (2015). Parenting talent: A qualitative investigation of the roles parents play in talent development. *Roeper Review, 37*, 84–96.
- Wolfenden, L. E., & Holt, N. L. (2005). Talent development in elite junior tennis: Perceptions of players, parents, and coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 17*, 108–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200590932416>
- Woolger, C., & Power, T. G. (1993). Parent and sport socialization: Views from the achievement literature. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 16*, 171–189.

Wu, E. H. (2008). Parental influence on children's talent development: A case study with three Chinese American families. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 32, 100–129.

Yin, R. K. (1989). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

USA Swimming. (2016). *Club Excellence Program results*. Retrieved August 30, 2017, from <https://www.usaswimming.org/news-landing-page/2017/02/16/2016-club-excellence-results>

Table 1

Themes, Codes, and Sample Quotations

Themes	Codes	Sample Quotations
Hard Work	Arduous practice Child characteristics Motivation Effort Routine	It is just part of our rhythm of the day to go to the gym and practice. Even on Christmas Eve....
Focus on Fundamentals	Coaching basics Re-teaching Focus on technique Strong foundation	Coach Bonnie took me back to the basics of twirling.
An Established Family Link to Talent Domain	Introduction to talent area Parent in talent area Sibling in talent area	Both her brothers were swimmers, so Olivia grew up always going to their swim meets and hanging around the swim program.
Extraordinary Parent Involvement	Parenting philosophy Management Finance Emotional support Sacrifices	My mom takes me to every single lesson.
Environment Building	Family environment Environmental resources/limitations Home design Recruiting coaches	The reason we chose to live where we do is that we wanted the kids to grow up in the type of rural environment that made me successful and to pass that along to them.