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Talent Abounds: Profiles of Master Teachers and Peak Performers by Robert F. Arnove [book review]

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United States will likely cite the loss of its human capital advantage and note that higher education policy was asleep at the switch” (66).

While McMahon’s goal of increasing public funding for higher education is clearly a worthy one, he may face an uphill battle in spreading his message, given current economic realities, with higher-education funding in both the United States and the United Kingdom being cut left and right (California’s invaluable Cal Grants, which provide more than \$100 million a year to nontraditional and so-called second-chance students, are simply one of several recent casualties). With that said, *Higher Learning, Greater Good* is actually more important now than ever—and it’s certainly a worthy read for anyone seriously interested in the topic of public versus private funding in higher education.

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Talent Abounds: Profiles of Master Teachers and Peak Performers by Robert F. Arno. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009. 258 pp. \$92.00 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper). ISBN 978-1-59451-633-7.

Studies of teaching and learning in the fields of music, dance, athletics, chess, advanced mathematics, and the culinary arts are not often included in comparative studies of education. *Talent Abounds: Profiles of Master Teachers and Peak Performers* offers readers an insightful glimpse into this realm through rich narratives of those who have excelled as performers and who have chosen teaching as a means of advancing their respective fields. Between innate talent and success in each of these fields lie a host of potentialities related to access to opportunities for training (based often on class, race, gender, geographic location, and nationality), public policy, and the status of a field at a particular historical moment. Offering longitudinal data that spans over 13 years of interviews with 150 individuals, the book’s author, Robert Arno, highlights individuals who form part of “a continuum of knowledgeable and skillful educators going back for generations” (1) and who, influenced by their own excellent teachers, choose education rather than performance alone as a way to nurture talent and inspire passion for their craft in younger generations. The profiles presented weave together various strands of effective teaching strategies in the various fields the author examines. These strategies include individualized instruction, the ability to instill within learners a love for the field, acknowledgment of the limits of one’s knowledge as an educator, and effective discipline that motivates, not extinguishes, the learner’s interest in further advancement.

On the part of learners, certain commonalities of experience also emerge in the narratives presented by Arno. The role of parents is oft mentioned, with interest in a particular field being sparked within the family, parents going to great lengths to allow their children to pursue extracurricular instruction, and the line between teacher and parent regularly being blurred in both directions. Strong

reciprocal bonds between students and teachers characterize nearly all the life histories included in *Talent Abounds*. Students (and educators in their reflections on their younger years) generally had early experiences with success that motivated them to continue practicing and learning. Additionally, effective mentorship from a variety of sources and interventions (such as financial sponsorship, advanced training, access to experts in the field) at critical moments was a key component in the development of the individuals profiled.

In each of the fields, differences existed about what mastery entailed. In some cases (classical music, opera, and chess, among others), role modeling and mastery of a set domain of expertise were required; in other fields (jazz, modern dance, culinary arts, among others), learning the basics and the ability to innovate were paramount. In other narratives, the individual's ability to create new techniques within a preset field could facilitate greater advancement toward success, such as in developing new methods for diving, playing the tuba, or solving mathematical mysteries. The interplay between the mastery of a field's existing body of work and the innovation and creation of new works yielded comparative information about how teaching styles must adapt to the subject matter at hand. In the case of each educator, their strategies, shaped by their own learning experiences, were customized to the content of the field in which talent was being nurtured. Many of the educators profiled also expanded and redefined their fields through innovations related to performance and teaching.

Scholars in comparative and international education should be especially interested in Arnove's analysis both of the ways in which race, class, gender, and nationality shape opportunity and access and of the role public policy plays across nations in identifying and cultivating talent through state-sponsored programs. In the United States, from which most of Arnove's cases are drawn, private foundations, sympathetic teachers, nonprofit organizations, after-school programs, public magnet schools for science and the arts, and, in some cases, the intervention of wealthy supporters all feature prominently in the narratives presented. By examining public policy across national contexts, Arnove highlights different ideologies surrounding talent and the role of the state in nurturing it. In the case of the former Soviet Union, state-sponsored programs designed to identify and cultivate talent in chess across the country resulted in more egalitarian access to the game regardless of students' backgrounds. Arnove notes that where public policy is absent and access to extracurricular fields is based on family resources and exposure, fields tend to "establish barriers to entry on various discriminatory grounds, most commonly those of race, ethnicity, social class, and gender" (200).

Greater analysis of the role of power in teaching-learning relationships would have revealed further information about the limits and possibilities of developing successful relationships across contexts. While Arnove mentions different models of teaching in Asia and Africa throughout the text, notions of hierarchy, power, and legacy among peak performers and master teachers in non-Western settings are left largely unexamined. Chapter 8 introduces readers to Bernard Woma, an accomplished xylophonist and music educator from Ghana. This case attends, in part, to the issue of differentiated cultural approaches to teaching, namely, learning through observation and trial in a more apprentice-like fashion. Additional cases

outside North American and European settings would have enriched the narratives and the lessons drawn for comparative and international education scholars.

The core contribution of *Talent Abounds* is to our comparative understanding of talent and how it can be nurtured in extracurricular settings. The applicability of such lessons to formal schooling is mentioned, but not fully developed, in the analysis of the data presented. In the conclusion, Arnové highlights that the study included interviews with public school teachers from Indiana who have been recognized for excellent teaching; like the master teachers who give more one-on-one instruction in after-school settings, they “are enthusiastic and passionate about learning and teaching, they have a deep respect for each of their students, believe that the potential of all students can be developed, find the means to prove the challenges and arrange the specific academic tasks that further their students’ learning and personal growth, and are continually striving to increase their own mastery of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge as well as their effectiveness as educators” (243). These qualities, while admittedly useful for other teachers, could have been more substantiated in the body of the book through data from this subset of interviews with public school teachers and expanded upon with greater attention to comparative contexts. In the chapters on advanced mathematics and chess master teachers, evidence is presented on how such activities can enhance achievement in required subjects. This connection might have been drawn throughout the other fields discussed as well.

Nonetheless, *Talent Abounds* offers an important contribution to scholarship in comparative and international education by exploring the contours of achievement and the essential role of teachers who are equipped with sufficient knowledge, effective pedagogical skills, and the ability to inspire students. Examples of publicly funded programs for youth such as Chess in the Schools (New York City), the Venezuela State Youth Orchestra System, and the Liszt Academy (Hungary) offer policy makers evidence of the social benefits of investing in youth who may not otherwise be able to access opportunities to cultivate their talents in extracurricular fields. While private initiatives may offer some youth the critical support necessary for success in a particular field, they are often limited in funding and scope. Arnové makes a compelling case, substantiated by the rich life histories of a diverse set of respondents, for public policy to facilitate the work of master teachers in transforming talent into success for youth across national contexts.

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Educating against Extremism by Lynn Davies. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2008. 197 pp. \$29.95 (paper). ISBN 978-1-85856-426-5.

As I sit down to write, the government of Sri Lanka has just declared victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This 26-year-long war killed about 70,000 civilians and displaced another 265,000, now in refugee camps. Security is