Notes from: **Developing Talent in Young People**
Benjamin Bloom, ed. (New York, Ballantine Books, 1985) 600pp.

Summary of the middle years:
….....a time for learning how to do one thing very well and for closing doors to most alternatives.

Habit had clearly taken over with respect to lessons and practice. Parental motivation and monitoring became much less important. The piano, and an identity as a pianist, were not matter-of-fact to the child, taken for granted. (57)

But the primary way in which our swimmers learned to be perfectionists in these early years was through parental example. (146) "It can't be just good enough to pass, it has to be right."

From their parents' example [not words rt] they began to see the importance of not wasting time. Self-sufficiency was strongly stressed. "Once you're 18, you're on your own." "You won't me calling home every weekend. They did not breed dependency, the bred independence – from peer group, from them." (147)

Standards

Goals changed too. It was no longer necessary to win every race you competed in every week. The focus instead turned to time, ow fast you could swim. (167)

Talent

One of the more startling discoveries of our study has been that it takes a while to recognize swimming talent.....a phenomenon of the middle years. (173)

Swimmers described their talent as "feel for the water".....According to Howard Firby (1975), this "feel" also has a psychological component, a calm receptivity. [there is disagreement whether this quality is innate or learned....perhaps both rt]

Ch. 11. "**Phases of Learning**," Lauren A, Sosniak

1st phase: playful, many and immediate rewards. "tinkering around" (411)

2cnd phase: precision, skill, urge to excel, details, instruction more rational, less personal and informal than earlier. Discipline, systematic work (416)

3rd phase: technical precision to personal expression (420). Teacher wants pupil to be not so much a pianist as a musician (421).

"**Historical Views of Phases of Learning**"

There are certain kinds of changes that take place during the process of learning that are not only well accepted by educators and laymen alike but also assumed to be inherent in the process. There are, for example, "aha!" moments, growth spurts, plateaus, regression, and peak experiences. These words convey the impression of learning as serendipitous or whimsical. They are sometimes given some order by framing them with an episodic view of learning, the importance of which, accoding to Jerome Bruner.....is reflected in the almost universal division of school curricula into units. But even episodes imply an irregular, discontinuous, generally unpredictable view of learning. The pianists'

experiences seem much more systematic than that.

Educational research and practice rest on the premise that systematic, lawful changes do take place over an extended period of learning.... Educational psychologists have typically been concerned with lawful changes that take place in the learner. Curriculum specialists have worked to understand logical development of subject matter. (424)

But the systematic changes that psychologists have been concerned with are developmental changes that take place in children's general way of thinking or behaving, not those that take place in the acts of learning. (425)

David Feldman:.... "developmental psychology has concentrated on understanding those changes in a child's behavior without special environmental intervention." In contrast, learning is that portion of human development that results expressly from environmental intervention – from study, instruction, or experience....Curriculum specialists[??]: But an understanding of the structure of the disciplines is far removed from the understanding of the order that might exist in the experience of learning, in the "doing." The question is whether there are important developmental changes in the process of learning-found in the interaction of a learner with some subject matter within some environment (e.g. "instructional situation")-has been given little attention. (425f.) [Cf. Vygotsky notes on experimental formats for studying child development.]

Whitehead (1929) romance – precision – generalization (426)

Relating These Views to the Study of Talent Development

Problem: those men (Whitehead, Dewey, Hall) "all argued from the position of biological imperative. This is troublesome for two reasons. First, it is difficult to understand why they ground their arguments in the biological nature of man. Education is *not* a normal and naturally occurring phenomenon. (429)

The nature of the different periods of learning each [Whitehead and Hall] describes is strikingly similar to what the pianists and their parents described in great detail. This similarity contains a message, and that is twofold. First, we need to bring a long overdue perspective to studies of learning, to recognize that learning takes place over long periods of time and to study learning as it builds over time.[Cf. Vygotsky: not the content of development so much but the history/process of development] Second, a systematic pattern of successful learning may well exist, but in order to identify it we need to disengage the concept of learning from the broader one of human development.

Learning is distinct from human development, and the distinctions are such that our understanding of the latter may not tell us as much about the former as we think. As John Gardner (1961) reminds us...

If we are ever to help people learn better than 'average' or even better that what they would do without any intentional effort, we have to raise our understanding of learning beyond the limits imposed by age-related laws of spontaneous and universal human development.

When we do, we will still have a temporal dimension with which to contend. This belongs as much to studies of learning as to studies of any kind of growth, although it is typically ignored in the former. *The better we appreciate the time involved in learning something (especially learning it well), the greater the likelihood that we will improve our ability to create conditions that encourage long-term non-trivial growth.* (430)

Phases of Learning, Not Human Development

….....the type and amount of previous experience a student has had with a subject matter may be at least as important a guide for instruction as the age and psychosocial status of the learner.... they hint that the sequences of the phases may be pedagogically important, although not psychologically or biologically determined. (433)

Furthermore, that which can be gained from each phase seems to be a prerequisite for being able to make the most of the subsequent phases. (433)

The phases are not innately determined, nor do they arise from the subject matter of lessons or the curricula for a course of study. They emerge from the interaction of the learner, the teacher, and some subject matter – in the doing or the act of learning. (434)

Apparently it is only after the athletes have firmly committed themselves to the day-in and day-our regime of fine-tuning their bodies and their conceptions of what they are trying to do that they raise their horizons to the limits of what is possible in their sport. At first the discipline of their work seems almost an end in itself: to perfect one skill after another. *But eventually, as the athletes master the separate parts of their sport, they have to learn to put them together into a whole that is different than the parts.*[Gestalt perception-action coupling, systems-dynamic movement theory] And for all the dedication of their coaches and parents, eventually the athletes have to do this work by themselves and for themselves. (436)

Home Influences on Talent Development

Motivation initially often simply to facilitate participation with family and peers
The complexities involved in these later years of talent development usually made it impossible for the parents to play a leading role in the child's decisions and progress. (470)

The child who “made it” was not always the one who was considered the most “talented.” Many parents describe another one of their children as having more “natural ability.” The characteristics that distinguished the high achiever in the fields from his or her siblings, most parents said, was a willingness to work and a desire to excel. *Persistence*, *competitiveness*, and *eagerness* were often-used terms. (473)

A Long-Term Commitment to Learning

“cumulative advantage,” or “Those who are initially successful have greater opportunities for future success.” (491) Mathew Effect

The very accomplished individuals we talked with do not credit their achievements to any single force. Instead, their reports reveal a combination of motives for their work. Creating and maintaining a long-term commitment to learning means simultaneously developing a day-to-day perserverance and an appreciation for the year-by-year context for each day's work. It involves both narrowness of attention and a very broad vision. Although educators know a good deal about keeping students as a task for a short period of time, the same methods are not likely to be useful for helping students develop the extended kind of commitment that successful learning involves. At the very least, it seems difficult to conceive of creating and maintaining such a commitment unless the learning is a

vital and valued part of the students' lives. (506)

Generalizations About Talent Development

As they begin to receive recognition for the talent in the early years of instruction, the children's investment in the talent becomes greater. No longer was the prime motivation to please parents and teachers. (517)

In the first period of formal instruction it is evident that motivation and effort count far more than do the particular gifts or special qualities of the child. (518)

Although we cannot be certain of this, we believe that only a small percentage (10% or less) of these talented individuals had progressed far enough by age eleven or twelve for anyone to make confident predictions.... (533) ….We believe it is so hard to predict because what the individuals have already learned by ages eleven is very different from what and how they will learn at a later age... Being very good in one phase of learning may not have a high relation to being very good at a later phase...There are changes in the substance and style of learning and instruction as well as changes in what is to be learned. (534)

Precociousness in a talent field is not to be dismissed, but it can only be realistically viewed as an early stage in talent development. There are many years of increasingly difficult stages of talent development before the mature and complex talent will be fully attained. No matter how precocious one is at age ten or eleven, if the individual doesn't stay with the talent development process over many years, he or she will soon be outdistanced by others who do continue. (538)

All the talented individuals we interviewed invested considerable practice and training time, which rivaled the time devoted to school or any other activity. (543)