



THROUGH THEIR EYES: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF A UNIVERSITY-BASED ENRICHMENT PROGRAM— THE UNIVERSITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE PROJECT

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Gifted students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are frequently underrepresented in gifted and talented programs (Borland & Wright, 1994; Ford, 1996; Worrell, Szarko, & Gabelko, 2001). This problem has been discussed in the research literature for more than 30 years and continues to persist (Johnsen, 2003). A number of factors have been identified that appear to limit gifted and talented services to this population: narrow concepts and definitions of giftedness, restrictive identification procedures, inadequate programming, and environmental factors such as social support systems (Coleman & Gallagher, 1995; Diaz, 1998; Hébert, 1998; Olszewski-Kubilius, Grant, & Seibert, 1993; Passow & Frasier, 1996; Tomlinson, Callahan, & Lelli, 1997).

In attempting to address this important issue, professionals have developed and implemented a variety of interventions (Awaya, 2001; Borland, Schnur, & Wright, 2000; Johnsen & Ryser, 1994; Maker, Rogers, Nielson, & Bauerle, 1996; VanTassel-Baska, Johnson, & Avery, 2002). This article will examine one of these interventions, enrichment in a university setting, and describe the students' perspectives toward the program and their growth in interests and career goals.

Since 1999, Baylor University, in collaboration with the City of Waco, has provided scholarships for enrichment activities to gifted students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These students participate in the University for Young People (UYP) summer pro-

gram on Baylor's campus; a weekend Interdisciplinary Creative Problem Solving Conference (ICPSC); and monthly Super Saturday activities. The goals of these activities are to (a) identify and nurture students' interests and possible career goals; (b) integrate the students into enrichment activities that develop these interests; and (c) provide ongoing support to students and their parents.

Participants

This article will focus on 5 cases from one cohort of 40 students who participated in the UYP Project during 1999–2002. Of the gifted students in this cohort who received need-based scholarships in 2002, 9% were in the 4th grade, 21% in the 5th grade, 17% in the 6th grade, 27% in the 7th grade, 20% in the 8th grade, and 6% in 9th and 10th grades. Approximately 4% were Asian American, 42% were African American, 34% were Hispanic, and 20% were White, which is representative of the urban school district in which they were enrolled. The majority of the students were female (59%), and

41% were male. Ninety-three percent of these students had siblings, and 65% lived with both parents. All of these students had to meet the poverty guidelines established by the U.S. Office of Housing and Urban Development.

To enter the program, each of the students completed an application packet, which included intelligence and achievement test scores, teachers' and parents' ratings, a goal statement, and a product or performance that showed an area of talent. UYP staff and teachers who served gifted students in the district assisted the parents and children in completing the applications in Spanish or English as needed. A UYP committee reviewed each of the applications, noting strengths and weaknesses, and recommended students for participation based on their performance, interests, and economic need.

Program

Each newly identified student and his or her parents were invited to attend an April meeting to register for UYP summer classes. At that time, the project director discussed the courses and helped the students identify which ones might match their interests. After registration, the students were placed in peer groups with a mentor and attended a presummer meeting to become familiar with their cohort of nine other students, their mentor, and the university campus. For the most part, none of the students had ever been on a university campus before, even though Baylor was within walking distance of many of their homes.

During June, the students attended UYP enrichment classes on campus for 4 weeks from approximately 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. Their daily schedule included breakfast

and lunch in a dormitory cafeteria, a period of free time to spend with their group and mentor after lunch, and three selected courses that matched their interests. Each course lasted for 2 weeks, so students were able to take a total of six courses during the summer program. As the summer progressed, the mentors began to know the UYP Project students better and were able to help guide subsequent selection of courses for the second session.

Following the summer activities, the director and the mentors planned monthly follow-up activities with the parents, students, and their teachers. Some of these included classroom enrichment options, monthly Super Saturday events, the weekend ICPSC, university cultural and sporting events, and at-home activities. To encourage the high school students' participation, new courses for UYP were developed for this age group each year, with an option to assume the role of a paid junior mentor during their junior or senior year of high school.

Data Collection and Analysis

A case study was maintained for each of the UYP Project students. Data included in each case were UYP application information (test scores, nomination checklists, products); dialogue journals (daily written interactions between the mentor and the student); reflection logs (daily and weekly summaries of the mentors' observations of individual students' strengths and weaknesses); student and parent interviews; and evaluations from parents, students, and teachers about the program.

Each student's case study was analyzed independently. The documents within the case study were compared and contrasted to examine

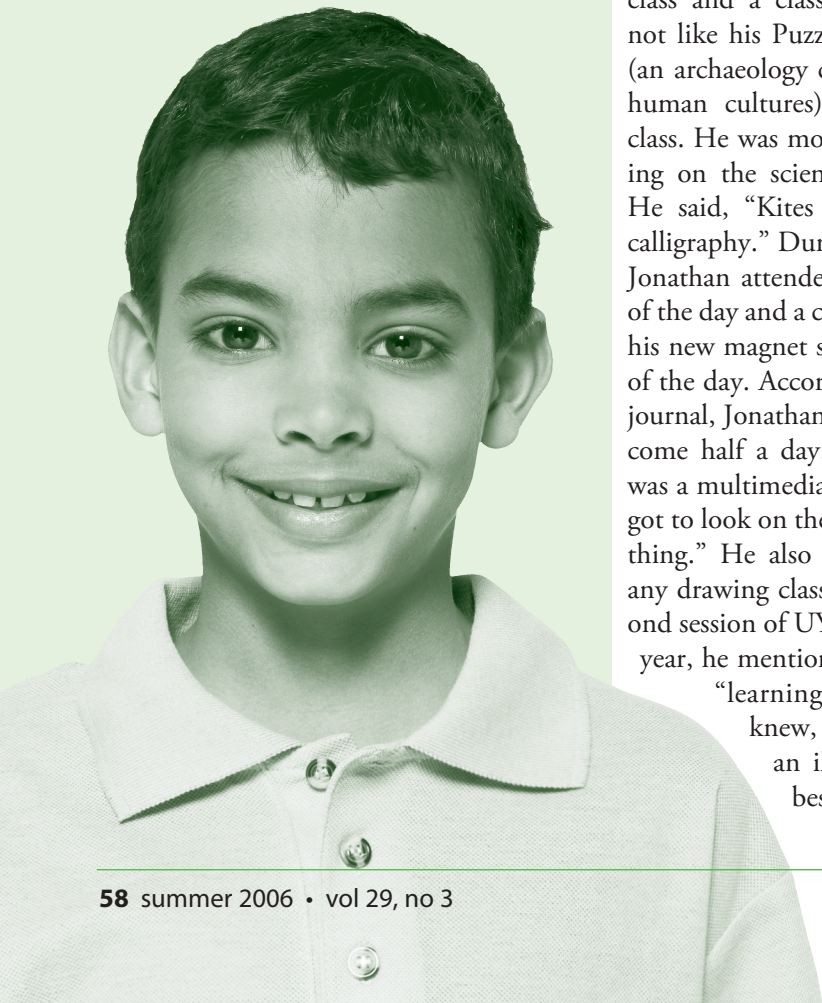
the student's development, particularly in his or her interests, and his or her perspectives of the university-based enrichment program. Five cases of students who participated in the UYP program for at least 3 years were selected as representative examples of their interests and their viewpoints of the program. The grade listed next to each student's name is the grade in which he or she was in during 1999.

Findings

Jonathan (Eighth Grade, Hispanic)

Interests. In his journal and on his evaluations, Jonathan described his developing interests in computers and drawing. On his first-year evaluation of the summer program, he enjoyed "computers, investigations, and French." He mentioned that he wanted to continue learning about computers. He felt that his best work was in the independent study class, one in which students could pick a topic of interest, gather research, and develop a product to present to the class and the mentors at the end of the course. During his second year in the program, he enjoyed hands-on activities such as kite making and drawing. He also enjoyed learning how to do "reports, spreadsheets, Microsoft PowerPoint, drawing, and some other stuff in [his] computer class." His mentor mentioned that Jonathan enjoyed the Super Saturday class on sculpting. She said, "He really enjoyed this class because he was able to create a number of different figures with the clay. They were given the freedom to create what they wanted. This is one of the first times I have seen Jonathan so focused and enjoying a class for the whole entire time." On another Super Saturday, he mentioned to his mentor that he was taking art in school, "Mr.

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Gutierrez makes me strain my creativity—it's hard!" During Jonathan's third year, he continued to write about his interests in computers and drawing.

Career Goals. His career interests appeared to relate to the courses that he was taking on campus. For example, Jonathan was excited about being accepted into an urban magnet school that focused on technology because "I get my very own laptop to use." During his third summer, Jonathan also began asking questions about coming to Baylor—"When and how can I get a scholarship here? I like it here cuz [*sic*] it isn't far from my house and some of the buildings are nice. Also, I'm very familiar with the campus." His mentor said that Jonathan has maintained his interest in attending college and wants to go to a local university or technical school.

Attitudes Toward UYP. During his first year, Jonathan mentioned that he liked the independent study class and a class on space. He did not like his Puzzles of the Past class (an archaeology course studying past human cultures) or his calligraphy class. He was moved to a class focusing on the science of kites instead. He said, "Kites is way better than calligraphy." During the second year, Jonathan attended UYP for one half of the day and a computer academy at his new magnet school the other half of the day. According to his dialogue journal, Jonathan was "happy I get to come half a day." His favorite class was a multimedia course because "we got to look on the Internet and everything." He also asked if there were any drawing classes open for the second session of UYP. During the third year, he mentioned that he enjoyed,

"learning things I never knew, like how to make an iMovie." He felt his best product was his

iMovie and all of his Lego creations that were developed in his Lego engineering course. He added, "I was able to build whatever I wanted instead of being told what to build." He wanted to continue learning about Japan, computers, drawing, and advanced Web pages. He said, "I'm glad I can come back next year again."

Candice (Fifth Grade, White)

Interests. During her first summer at UYP, her mentor noted that Candice enjoyed physical activities, computers, math, French, and music. Candice mentioned that she enjoyed performing in a play and thought UYP "was cool because I learned more" than she did in school. She liked iMovies the best during the third summer of the program. She also wanted to continue learning about sculpting. Her mother noted that she did not notice any new interests at home because Candice was busy "playing softball," which "takes up a lot of time."

Career Goals. During the second year, Candace wrote in her dialogue journal that her career goal was to be a teacher "at Baylor or . . . to teach the 5th graders. . . ." During the third year, Candice mentioned that she wanted to go to college and play softball. She believed that UYP was "helping me with my academic skills, and it's bringing me one step closer to getting an academic scholarship for college."

Attitudes Toward UYP. On her first year evaluation, Candace mentioned "I hope I come next summer!" A few years later, Candice wrote "my favorite thing about UYP this year [third year] is when I see my friends and my classes. My favorite class for the first session was iMovies and for this session, I would have to say WebQuest."

Cynthia (Fifth Grade, White)

Interests. In her second-year journal, Cynthia said, “I am very interested in space. I want to be an astronomer when I grow up. I saw Apollo 13, too, and it was good.” On her third-year evaluation, she noted that she wanted more classes in computer and in engineering. She mentioned that “I LOVE [*sic*] my Japan class. It’s fun and right now there are only 5 students . . . so we get to learn a lot.” She also mentioned to her mentor that she keeps “a poetry journal at home.” Throughout her dialogue journals, Cynthia draws faces similar to those found in Japanese animated video games.

Career Goals. In the fifth grade Cynthia mentioned that she wanted to get a Ph.D. in astronomy and be an astronomer. Her hero is Einstein. When her mentor asked her why she became interested in space, she responded, “I decided to be an astronomer when my dad told me about the Big Bang theory.” During a third-year interview, Cynthia said that education is “okay” and that her aspirations were to “get a Ph.D. in astronomy . . . because I think space is really fascinating.”

Attitudes Toward UYP. During her first year in the UYP Project (following her fourth-grade year), Cynthia wrote in her dialogue journal that UYP was “GREAT!!!” She enjoyed her French, PE, and space classes. She said, “In one of my classes I had to build a mini Mars base. This was outstanding for me because I got to sort of experience life on Mars.” In her first-year journal, she wrote lengthy descriptions about each of her classes. She described all of her classes as “really fun.” One of her comments about a product is very telling: “My brochure turned out really neat. I’m in love with it and I won’t let anyone except me touch it unless they’ve washed their hands.”

Her second-year evaluation said that she enjoyed the “field trip to the Shale Pit,” “taking pictures,” and learning “new art techniques.” She described her art product as “very creative” and enjoyed “our play in Shakespeare.” On her third-year evaluation, Cynthia liked her Lego engineering course, WebQuest, and lunch. She felt that her scratch-art drawing was her best product during the first session; during the second session, she liked her iMovie and her Web page “because I worked hard on them.” Her mother mentioned that “she has discussed her classes and she is crazy about UYP.”

Fabian (Seventh Grade, Hispanic)

Interests. Fabian’s favorite courses at UYP the first year were photography, creative writing, and French. He added in “photography, I learned how to develop black and white pictures.” He also was “learning to have a conversation in French. I’m surprised that I learned how to.” In a 2000 follow-up log, his mentor mentioned, “Fabian is a very creative person. He really enjoys making original art and loves to do this kind of work.” During the second year of the program, he “liked debate and WebQuest the most.” During the third year, his mother mentioned that Fabian’s strength was debating and his weakness was sports. In his third-year interview, Fabian said “one of my strengths would be that I like to read and enjoy learning. A weakness of mine would be that I am not very outgoing.” His mentor reported, “Fabian is not very comfortable in physical activities and would rather read. . . . He enjoys the ‘Harry Potter’ books.”

Career Goals. In a first-year interview, Fabian said that he wanted to “go to college and become a doctor.” During a third-year interview, Fabian said “I feel that education is a very



important part of life. It practically determines whether or not I am successful in life. I feel that in my life I will need to and want to go to college." He added in his interview, "In fact, setting goals is like pretending. Without goals I would have nothing to strive for." In answer to a question about his goals in his third-year interview, Fabian said,

My long term goals are that I go to college and become whatever I desire. Since I was 6 I had wanted to become a doctor/surgeon, but I've explored other careers and now I really don't know what I want. Sometimes I think about Marine Biology and other times I think about becoming something that has something to do with NASA.

He said to his mentor:

UYP has shown me through classes and mentors that it is not impossible to go to college. It has also prepared me for a college campus. I believe that I need to get familiar with Baylor campus because I will probably come here. I also made many friends that attend Baylor or attended and when I need help, they will help me.

His mother said during an interview with the mentor, "Education is very important to the children. I want to learn English well. Be with them more." She added, "I want my kids to finish a career."

Attitudes Toward UYP. During the first year, Fabian said in his evaluation that he enjoyed "My classes and mentor. [A]ctually it was all a blast!" He mentioned in his journal "I like creative writing because we can write a book about anything we want. And

it's just a feeling that I get of the freedom to write anything I want." In his second year dialogue journal he wrote, "I've had a great time so far and hope that I get to have the privilege [*sic*] of coming next year." At the end of his journal, he wrote "UYP has been very educational and fun. The classes are all so fun and creative. It gives us and you something to do over the summer. Without it right now I'd be rotting my mind watching TV."

Robert (Sixth Grade, African American)

Interests. On his application his mother mentioned that Robert liked singing; playing violin, cello, and bass; and sports. She said, "Robert is very advanced in his mathematical skills. He loves music and singing performing, and playing musical instruments." During the first year, Robert said that he enjoyed the Sports Heroes and PE courses the best. "I learned about Earl Campbell and in PE I learned how to play football with a frisby [*sic*] and I learned how to make space art." After the first year, his mother said on her evaluation, "Robert has begun to collect different items: space materials, quarters, and models of different modes of transportation. These items are displayed throughout his bedroom." During the second year of the program, Robert stated that he enjoyed basketball, especially the Lakers. The mentor reported that "he talks about [the Lakers] the majority of his journaling." During the third year, his mother said, Robert "talked a lot about his building bridges class and also the scrapbook class. . . . He became interested in art and I had not noticed that before." In her interview, his mother said, "Robert's strengths in school would be math and athletics."

Career Goals. In his third-year interview, he said "I think that it is very important to get an education to survive in the world." He added that his goal was "to go to college and get all my degrees or diplomas that I can." His mother said, "I feel that an education is very important. I really want Robert to get a good education and to be successful." She added, "I would like to see Robert graduate high school and college and get a good job in a field that he enjoys."

Attitudes Toward UYP. During Robert's first year, he said, "I liked everything." His mother said, "Robert is constantly talking about his classes. He particularly discusses all he has learned about various sports heroes." Robert mentioned how much he liked French in his journal. He also mentioned that "UYP has helped me by teaching me things I've never heard about and now I can use those abilities. THANKS [*sic*]." The second-year mentor reported that Robert appeared to like his classes except for leadership, although in responding to his mentor in his dialogue journal, he said [about leadership class], "I found out that I'm independent." During the third year, Robert felt that his best products were those developed in his calligraphy, building bridges (engineering), and scrapbook classes. In his interview, Robert mentioned, "I love to take the classes here." His mentor noted that Robert "enjoyed going to the library. . . . Robert . . . wanted to sit around and draw."

Conclusions

These five students illustrate some of the characteristics that we discovered about many of the talented UYP Project students. First, while they had a variety of interests, they appeared to enjoy technology, the visual arts,

performing, and developing products in their areas of interest—whether writing a book or a poem, developing Web pages or brochures, or building bridges or kites. These products seemed to enhance their self-efficacy about learning (e.g., [I was] “learning things I never knew”) and their beliefs about their skills (e.g., “now I can use those abilities”). Second, they enjoyed courses that were challenging and matched their interests. As Cynthia noted, she was able to “build a mini Mars base,” which was of great interest to her “because [she] got to sort of experience life on Mars.” Third, these youngsters began developing an interest in attending college. Becoming familiar with a campus setting increased their beliefs that college might be an option for them, not an impossibility. Finally, for some of the students, social aspects were as important as academic aspects. For example, Candice mentioned that her “favorite thing about UYP this year is when I see my friends. . . .” Similarly, Fabian felt that he was building social capital for his future years at the university when he said, “. . . I also made many friends that attend Baylor or attended and when I need help, they will help me.”

Teachers and administrators will want to consider these findings when developing programs for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Designing curricula based on students' interests that have tangible products appear to motivate these gifted students and develop their beliefs in their abilities to create. They also enjoy the camaraderie of friends with similar interests and goals—a consideration when grouping students for instruction. Gifted students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have academic expectations similar to other gifted students—they just need advocates and programs that

will make these aspirations become a reality. **GCT**

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