



Talent Assessment in the Performing Arts



DMT *Dance
Music
Theater*
TAP

TAP—the Talent Assessment Process in Dance, Music and Theater (DTAP, MTAP, TTAP)—is the first systematic, research-based talent identification process designed specifically for use in schools. The assessments in the three disciplines were created by arts professionals, tested in a wide range of schools, and supported by more than ten years of research that has shown the processes to be valid, reliable, and equitable to students from different cultures and backgrounds with varied language abilities, and with or without prior experience in the art form.



Key Features of TAP

Three distinct processes

D/M/TAP share a common format but are distinct processes specific to each art form.

Multiple sessions

Four sessions for full classrooms give all students an introduction to the art form and allow students to demonstrate a range of skills and talents.

Multiple observers

Collaboration between arts specialists and classroom teachers invites different points of view and provides more thorough observations, resulting in a more complete and equitable assessment.

Authentic test conditions

Students are observed while deeply engaged in arts activities rather than in potentially inhibiting test conditions. Structured, creative activities reflect actual arts classes, providing a reliable prediction of success through instruction. A safe, enjoyable atmosphere helps to overcome unfamiliarity and shyness, allowing students to take risks and give their best.

Inclusive, easily understood criteria

Criteria developed by professional artists and arts educators representing a variety of artistic approaches is easily understood by both experts and non-experts.

Curriculum adaptable to many artistic styles, techniques, and cultural traditions

Activities are designed by local arts specialists using a curriculum framework. Assessment is not based on students' prior experience with a specific technique.

Easy-to-use instruments

A simple marking and scoring system allows observers to pay full attention to the class. Scoring is based on cumulative notices of all observers rather than subjective numerical scores. Both specific criteria and intuitive observations are taken into account.

Classroom teachers trained to recognize artistic talent

Direct involvement of the classroom teachers increases their appreciation and knowledge of students' creative and artistic abilities which can be used to support learning throughout the curriculum.

Talent profile developed for every student

Every student is noticed, discussed, and assessed. More than a screening or identification system for outstanding talent, the process provides valuable information on the abilities, intelligences, interests, and learning styles of all students.



Questions and Answers about TAP

Are students pre-screened for TAP?

All students participate in the four-session process. Because so many students have never had formal arts instruction, they might not even know they are interested and might not choose to audition. Further, classroom teachers and parents may be unaware that their children are potentially talented. TAP is thus an introduction to the art form as well as an in-depth assessment of the creative and artistic abilities of every child.

Who conducts TAP?

TAP is conducted by two trained arts facilitators. In order to ensure the validity of the process, to observe the widest possible range of artistic abilities, and to make the experience rich and enjoyable for the students, facilitators are carefully trained to design and conduct the assessment. Training is available for art specialists and teaching artists to be accredited to administer TAP.

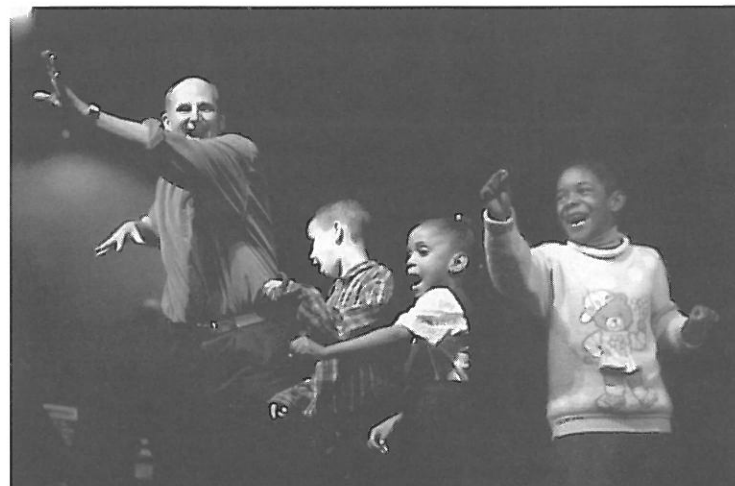
What if we don't have arts specialists to conduct TAP?

Few schools have specialists in all of the arts. Ideally schools can partner with local teaching artists, arts-in-education organizations, and other community resources to provide arts facilitators for TAP. School specialists can team with outside artists or other faculty members with an arts background. Schools can also share resources in order to conduct the assessments in all of the arts.

How are students served after they are identified as talented?

This is the most important question to answer when considering talent assessment. Potentially talented students benefit most from rigorous, challenging classes and work with other similarly talented, motivated students. TAP has proven to be a very accurate predictor of success in advanced instruction. Instruction for identified students can be provided in a number of ways—during the school day, after school, as part of a club program, or through a series of workshops with visiting teaching artists. Community resources can also be tapped. Many local arts schools provide multiple levels of instruction and offer scholarships for talented students. Identification of potential talent can be a powerful motivator for parents to find appropriate instruction for their children and for schools to add advanced groups and ensembles to their arts program.

continued



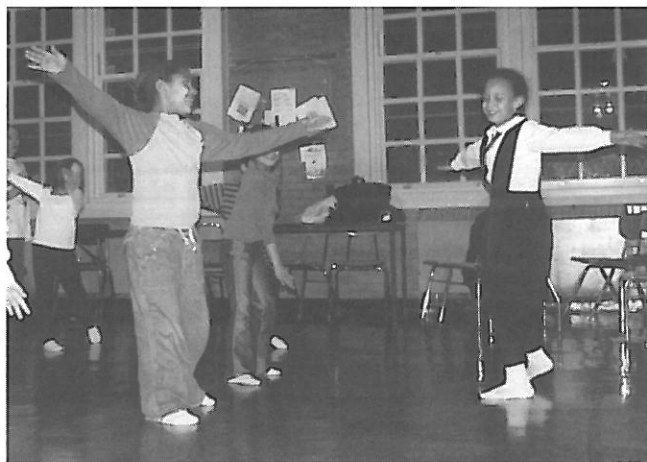
Questions and Answers About TAP *(continued)*

What is the ultimate goal of TAP?

TAP can be used for many purposes—to select students for advanced instruction, to evaluate students for magnet schools or special programs, or to identify students for gifted and talented programs. The ultimate goal of TAP, however, is more global: to allow the artistic and creative gifts, talents and interests of *all* students to be stimulated, recognized, and nurtured. Whether a student is identified as outstandingly talented or not, our research has demonstrated that increased awareness of students' artistic abilities on the part of teachers, parents, and students themselves can enhance students' performance and attitude both in and outside of the classroom.

How can TAP help schools reach high standards in the arts?

While not all schools offer advanced level instruction in the arts, TAP can serve both as an introduction to the arts and as a systematic method for assessing and designing instructional programs to meet the needs of all students. The individual information gathered through TAP can be used not only to identify potential talent but also to assess student progress toward state and national arts standards. The collaboration between arts specialists, classroom teachers, and teaching artists in TAP provides the basis for an effective instructional model that can enhance the school's existing arts programs. Further, identifying a student as potentially talented can motivate parents to advocate for additional arts instruction in school.



What about students who are not identified as talented?

TAP is designed to give all students an introduction to the art form in an enjoyable, supportive, environment. Depending on the size of the school and available arts resources, each class may participate in one, two, or all three TAP disciplines in a given year. Students are informed at the start and end of the process that they will have multiple opportunities to be identified and that the assessment is not a definitive classification of those who are talented and those who are not. Rather, TAP identifies students who are ready for more advanced instruction at that time. When students understand this distinction they tend to have a positive feeling about the experience.

Because classroom teachers are directly involved in the assessment, they gain valuable insights and information about the abilities, intelligences, and learning styles of all students, not just those who are eventually identified for advanced instruction. The professional development program for teachers that accompanies TAP is designed both to help teachers identify talent and to utilize artistic abilities in the classroom. Further, with the detailed information provided by TAP, teachers have a basis for discussions and recommendations with parents and administrators about the most appropriate instructional experiences for each child.

How to Use TAP in Gifted and Talented Identification

Selecting the process

The Talent Assessment Processes (TAP) in dance, music and theater are three separate processes that share a structure and philosophical approach to the identification of potential talent in the art forms. TAP gives students an introduction to the art form over a series of four classes while providing the setting and structure for classroom teachers and arts specialists to conduct a careful observational assessment of every student. The assessment is conducted in a safe, low-pressure, group environment in which students are able to take risks and do their best work. While there are, of course, many similarities and overlaps in the definitions of talent in the three art forms, each art form has distinct characteristics that bring out different talents and interests in students.

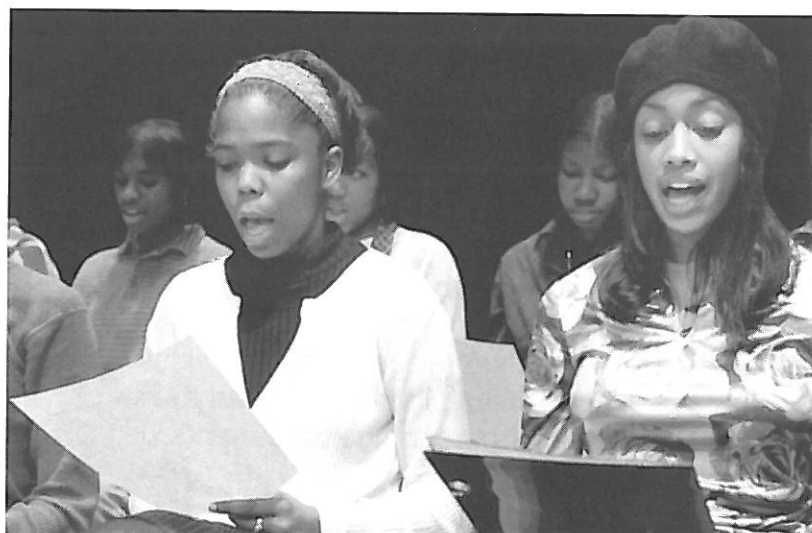
In order to select the appropriate assessment schools should consider several variables: 1) the arts specialists and local teaching artists available to administer the assessment, 2) instructional opportunities available for identified students in the school and community, 3) the aspects of student potential that other assessments in school overlook, and 4) the most pressing arts education needs of students, teachers, and the school community.

Grade levels

TAP was originally developed and tested in grades three through six. It has been successfully adapted to junior and senior high schools and to early childhood grades. Grades 3–6 have proved to be the ideal grades for talent identification for a number of reasons. At age 7–10, students have begun to choose their own activities and can avail themselves of out-of-school arts instruction. After two to three years of instruction in elementary school, students are prepared for application to middle school arts magnets, scholarships at community arts institutions, and self-initiated study. Further, the insights and information gained by elementary school classroom teachers as part of the assessment process can be directly applied to the classroom to help students succeed in all areas of the curriculum.

Given limited time and resources in most schools, particularly in the areas of dance and theater, it may be impossible to administer all of the assessments to all classes each year. Many schools administer one art form per grade level with additional opportunities for new students and teacher or self-nominations to be assessed each year. Schools should consider the available instructional resources in the school and community for students of different ages and link the assessment process to the service plan for identified students.

continued



How to Use TAP in Gifted and Talented Identification *(continued)*

Percentages of students identified / service plan

Decisions about numbers of students to be identified should be made before implementing the assessment process. While TAP data can be highly useful to classroom teachers, parents, and administrators, identified students need appropriate instructional opportunities to develop their talents and build on their strengths. The final numbers of identified students should be linked to a service plan that can help provide ongoing instruction. Few schools offer multiple levels of instruction in all of the art forms. There are many potential service delivery plans, however, that can enhance the school's arts program and help students, teachers, and parents take advantage of community resources. Adding an advanced level class to a school art or music specialist's schedule, establishing enrichment classes or clubs, employing visiting teaching artists to provide challenging workshops, and working with local studios and theaters can all be part of a plan to serve identified students.

In the decade that TAP has been administered in the New York City Public Schools through ArtsConnection's Young Talent Program, an average of 15–20 percent of students have been identified as talented. Another 15 percent were identified as possible candidates and were placed on a waiting list for advanced instruction. In the Young Talent Program model, identified students receive advanced level classes once a week during and, in some cases, after school. In schools with a high number of students per grade or fewer arts classes, cutoff scores are raised and the final rater consensus process adjusted to identify a smaller percentage of students.



Training arts facilitators to administer the assessment

The assessment process and talent definitions were designed to be adaptable by arts educators representing a variety of styles and techniques. Using the assessment framework and criteria, arts specialists develop their own four-session curriculum relevant to the culture and values of the students and the objectives of the school's arts education program. A competent arts instructor in the specific art form is required to teach the assessment classes. A team of two artists is highly recommended; by co-teaching, the arts experts can alternate active teaching with observation and scoring. The instructors can be school specialists, professional teaching artists from an outside community organization, parents, or other school personnel, or a team of specialists who conduct the assessment in multiple schools. Whenever possible, it is preferable for the team of two instructors to be of different genders and ethnicities and represent different artistic styles, particularly if the school has a diverse population.

Training of arts facilitators consists of an initial 20-hour program to develop the assessment curriculum. Follow-up meetings with TAP trainers are scheduled after the first classes with students to evaluate and make improvements to the curriculum. After completion of the training and a successful implementation of a full assessment process with students, facilitators will be accredited to administer TAP in other schools.

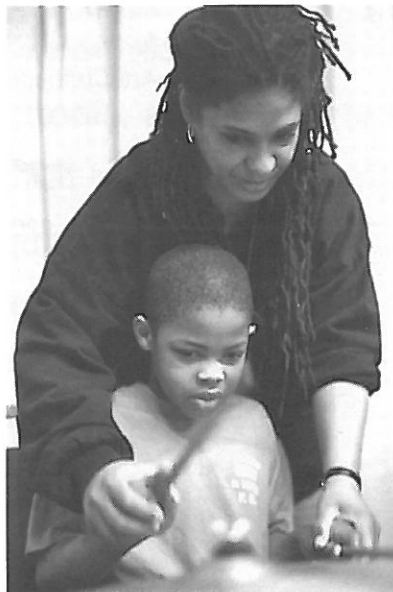
Scheduling and preparation

TAP consists of four period-long sessions for every class on a grade level, including special education, bilingual, and gifted classrooms. Each intact classroom participates as a group for all four sessions. If there are a large number of classes on a grade, a fifth “callback” session may be added, evaluating tentatively identified students from all classes as a single group. The four TAP classes can be scheduled once a week or more frequently. At the end of each assessment class, the two arts instructors and observers (classroom teacher and others, if desired) hold a 10–15 minute conference while the students are engaged in a quiet activity or are taken back to the classroom. Classes are scheduled in hour-long blocks to accommodate the class and the conference.

If scheduling or space constraints preclude the arrangement of separate sessions for small special education or other classes, these classes can be combined or can be integrated with a small regular class, with certain adjustments (see Adaptations for Special Populations).

Space

The dance assessment requires a large open space (free of obstructions) such as a gym or multipurpose room. An auditorium can also be used if the stage is large enough to accommodate a full class of students safely. The music process also requires clear, open space, and ideally has access to a piano. Theater can be conducted in classrooms with chairs and desks moved out of the way or any quiet space that has adequate acoustics to allow individual students to be heard.



Raters

At least three raters assess the students, ideally the two arts instructors and the classroom teacher. Additional observers may be included for one or more sessions and may fill out observation forms, but final evaluation of students is conducted only by those who have observed all of the sessions. Gifted or arts specialists, outside experts, other classroom teachers, or administrators may also participate as raters or observers and can provide valuable observations and insights and additional reliability and validity checks for the process.

Training for classroom teachers and school specialists to be TAP raters is conducted by the arts facilitators prior to the beginning of the assessment. The initial training workshop familiarizes teachers with the criteria and process and includes sample participatory arts activities. This gives teachers a personal experience of the process and helps them better understand and empathize with their students during TAP classes.

Multiple raters offer a variety of perspectives and enhance the ability to see a large group of students simultaneously. Assessing large groups engaged in performance activities can be a stressful experience. In this process, the raters are free to move about the room to see all of the students and can pay attention to individuals for a period of time with the knowledge that other raters will be noticing other students and other characteristics. This awareness frees the observer to focus on subtle behaviors, on students who are not initially seen, and on difficult-to-assess characteristics such as perseverance and response to feedback. The combined perceptions and evaluations of the three raters reveal far more about the students than could be noticed by a single observer.

continued

How to Use TAP in Gifted and Talented Identification *(continued)*

Adaptations for special populations

Preferably, small bilingual and special education classes can participate as intact groups throughout the assessment process. However, in situations where time or space are too limited to schedule a separate period for all classes, small classes can be combined into one larger class or can be merged with small regular education classes. Occasionally, in the case of mixed grade classes, individual students of the grade level being assessed can be included with another class. This arrangement, however, may make it impossible for the classroom teacher to be present as an observer/rater.

Students in special self-contained classes may find the pairing with other classes uncomfortable, particularly if they are sometimes excluded from school activities. One way to counteract students' discomfort is to have the special class arrive first or to have the arts instructors visit their classroom before the class to give them a preview of the class and make them feel as though they are the class that is being joined, rather than the outsiders. This simple adjustment has proved very successful in encouraging full participation by specialized classes when paired with other classes.



DMT Dance Music Theater TAP

THE TALENT ASSESSMENT PROCESS (D/M/T TAP), forms and instruments, training materials and information were developed by ArtsConnection through grants from the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program of the United States Department of Education. TAP has been used since 1991 in ArtsConnection's Young Talent Program in New York City Public Schools.

ArtsConnection would like to acknowledge the teaching artists and classroom teachers who helped to develop the criteria and who have implemented and improved the process for the past ten years.

Full reports on the TAP development and research are available from ArtsConnection. For further information, contact Dr. Barry Oreck at ArtsConnection:

ArtsConnection

120 W. 46th Street, New York, NY 10036
(212) 302-7433 ext. 1360

Text: Barry Oreck

Design: Christine Kluhspies

Photos: Virginia Dimsey (page 1 center), Evan Kafka (pages 3 and 5), Vivienne Leheny (pages 4 and 6), Phil Mansfield (page 1 bottom, page 2, page 7, page 8 top left and top bottom), Barry Oreck (page 1 top).

