Sample Essay #5

Success is a process which takes form in opportunity, experience, and chance. It is a series of serendipitous events that lead to the genesis of talent and ultimately success.

Opportunity begins at a young age-showing initial proficiency will get you noticed earlier on and the earlier you are noticed, the more attention you will be given. With this attention, you will have the chance to join the more ‘elite’ programs in your particular field. There is a direct correlation between the combination of opportunity and experience in this case- those who get the opportunity to join the top programs at young ages are going to get more practice and subsequently more effective experience in which talent is cultivated. The more experience one has equates to the number of hours one has, and the closer to ten thousand hours one has, according to Malcolm Gladwell, the more adept that person will be, because those ‘who would end up the best in their class began to practice more than everyone else: six hours a week by age nine, eight hours a week by age twelve, sixteen hours a week by age fourteen…until by age twenty they were practicing…well over thirty hour s a week…in fact, the elite…had totaled ten thousand hours,’ (Outliers 38-39). In the case with Bill Joy, Gladwell explains, his programming ability was a case of chance; computer engineering and programming was new, ‘it was a wide open field’ (39) where anyone could become the all star, but ‘because he happened to go to…the University of Michigan he was able to practice…because the Michigan system happened to have a bug in it, he could program all he wanted; because the university was willing to spend the money to keep the computer center open 24 hours, he could stay up all night’ so that ‘by the time he happened to be presented with the opportunity to rewrite UNIX, he was up to the task,’ (46). It was undeniably chance for Joy- he was in the right place at the right time to learn how to become an expert, all because ‘someone had given him the opportunity to learn how to become an expert,’ (46); he got in his ten thousand hours, and honed his talent with plenty of experience, the opportunity in a time when programming was unexplored, and the random chance to be at a university where all these things were possible.

Additionally, Malcolm Gladwell’s ‘Most Likely to Succeed’ presents an image of a classroom, with the caption, ‘Effective teachers have a gift for noticing-what one researcher calls a “withitness”’. This is saying that if a teacher notices, the student will get more attention, and with more attention, they are more likely to succeed in school because the teacher is more aware of that student. Teachers who notice are affording their students the opportunity to succeed. Inversely, Jonathon Kozol’s ‘Savage Inequalities’ denotes the distinct lack of opportunity in East St. Louis, Missouri. Most of the buildings are empty and run down, and ‘the city, which is often unable to buy heating fuel or toilet paper for the city hall, recently announced that it might have to cashier all but 10 percent of the remaining work of 230,’ (8) and the schools are just as bad. A student said ‘“I don’t go to physics, because my lab has no equipment. The typewriters in my typing class don’t work. The women’s toilets…” She makes a sour face. “I’ll be honest,” she says. “I just don’t use the toilets…’ (30). The students are not being given the proper resources, limiting their opportunities for learning, and with such limited education, and a decline in jobs, adolescents in East St. Louis are generally unsuccessful. They are not unsuccessful because they do not exhibit innate talents, rather ‘“Gifted children…are everywhere in East St. Louis, but their gifts are lost to poverty and turmoil and the damage done by knowing they are written off by society,’ (33-34). These children are not given any opportunities because society already views them as failures right at the start, so they are unable to cultivate talent through experience.

Success is also a matter of chance; it is random in that success in one particular are does not guarantee success in another. In Gladwell’s “Most Likely to Succeed” the best, most promising Quarterbacks from college football were drafted to professional teams, but out of five, ‘only one of them, Donovan McNabb, ended up fulfilling that promise.’ Even though all five of them were the ‘best’ most successful in their college teams, most of them ‘ended up failing’ out of the NFL. In ‘Outliers’ Gladwell says that while IQ is relevant to success, it is only relevant to a certain point, and after that point has been passed, it comes down to other factors. Throughout the varying stages of life and education, IQ takes you past basic aspects and to ordinary aspirations, but ‘IQ differences in this upper part of the scale have far less personal implications than the thresholds just described and are generally of lesser importance for success in the popular sense than are certain traits of personality and character,’ (79). IQ will get you to a point, but after that, it is up to random factors that you can’t necessarily control. Furthermore, Eric Wargo’s ‘The Myth of Prodigy and Why it Matters’ explains how initial prodigy will not always carry on over time, and initial mediocrity will not always remain. An interview with Malcolm Gladwell examines runners and how ‘of the 15 nationally ranked runners in his age class at age 13 or 14, only one of that group had been a top runner in his running prime, at age 24…The number one miler at age 24 was someone Gladwell had known as one of the poorer runners when they were young-Doug Consiglio, a “gawky kid” of whom all the other kids asked “why does he even bother?”’ Despite Doug Consiglio’s poor performance at an initial stage, some chance allowed him to end up excellent while Gladwell who had been ‘a running prodigy’ turned out to be ‘simply okay.’

Success is a random culmination of experience, chance, and opportunity. It is created through the honing of talent with the three factors as catalysts for high achievement.