Gifted and Talented Education: 
A Case for Policy Implementation

Åsa Elisabeth Melander
Abstract
In Sweden, an egalitarian ethos has long rendered it impossible even to consider the needs of gifted and talented (G&T) children. By interviewing English and Swedish educators and Swedish governmental officials, I compare the developments in the two countries and make recommendations as to how Sweden could improve its provision. Over the last ten years, following a House of Commons report in 1997, a number of measures have been implemented in England. In Sweden, some changes have taken place, notably the establishment of the focus classes [spetsutbildningar] in 2008. Although there is official support for G&T children and signs of changing attitudes in Sweden, there are still concerns about the general acceptance of G&T students’ need for support and help. Their social situation is often difficult and they do not always get challenged.

One recommendation is that Sweden, in line with many other countries, should investigate the option of setting a clear, national policy for gifted and talented children.

Åsa Melander
melanderasa@hotmail.com

Key words: gifted and talented, G&T, särbegåvad, utbildningspolitik, policy implementation, England, education policy, skolsystem, educational system.
Contents

1.0 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 7
  1.1 Aim and scope .................................................................................................................... 10
  1.2 Definitions ........................................................................................................................ 11
    1.2.1 Who is gifted and talented? ......................................................................................... 11
    1.2.2 Terminology ................................................................................................................ 12
2.0 Material and method ............................................................................................................ 14
  2.1 Procedure .......................................................................................................................... 14
  2.2 Interviews .......................................................................................................................... 15
  2.3 Questionnaires .................................................................................................................. 16
  2.4 Other material .................................................................................................................... 18
  2.5 Ethical considerations ......................................................................................................... 18
3.0 Theoretical framework and literary review .......................................................................... 19
  3.1 A theoretical background to policy analysis ..................................................................... 19
  3.2 The emergence of G&T research ...................................................................................... 20
  3.3 Gifted and Talented Education in Sweden ....................................................................... 23
  3.4 Gifted and Talented Education in England ..................................................................... 28
4.0 Findings: Views on G&T in England .................................................................................... 31
  4.1 Needs ................................................................................................................................ 31
  4.2 A national policy ................................................................................................................ 32
5.0 Findings: Views on G&T in Sweden ..................................................................................... 34
  5.1 Headteachers ..................................................................................................................... 34
    5.1.1 Current attitude .......................................................................................................... 34
    5.1.2 Focus classes .............................................................................................................. 36
    5.1.3 A national policy? ....................................................................................................... 37
    5.1.4 Other comments ........................................................................................................ 38
  5.2 Teachers ............................................................................................................................. 38
  5.3 Inger Wistedt, Professor of Education, Stockholm University ...................................... 40
  5.4 Christina Månberg, Director of Education, Swedish National Agency for Education .... 41
  5.5 Bertil Östberg, State Secretary, Department of Education, Sweden ........................... 42
6.0 Findings: Sweden and England – a comparison of factors relating to G&T ....................... 45
  6.1 Equality, equity and excellence ......................................................................................... 45
  6.2 Political leadership ............................................................................................................ 47
  6.3 The consequences of choice ............................................................................................. 48
  6.4 The role of single-sex education ....................................................................................... 49
  6.5 Social effects of being gifted and talented ....................................................................... 50
    6.5.1 Bullying ...................................................................................................................... 50
    6.5.2 Gender issues ............................................................................................................ 52
    6.5.3 Consequences of social difficulties and measures taken ........................................ 53
7.0 Discussion ............................................................................................................................ 54
  7.1 Personal reflections .......................................................................................................... 54
  7.2 My vision .......................................................................................................................... 57
  7.3 A new policy? .................................................................................................................... 61
  7.4 Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 63
List of references ....................................................................................................................... 65
Appendix 1: Interviews with English respondents ................................................................. 72
Appendix 2: interviews with Swedish Headteachers .................................................................. 72
Appendix 3: Questionnaire ....................................................................................................... 73
1.0 Introduction
For a long time gifted and talented/highly able children [särbegåvade barn] in Swedish schools have struggled to get their warranted attention and to be challenged.\(^1\) To consider the needs of them was taboo in Sweden well into the 1990s (see e.g. Persson 1997a:22; Persson1997b:passim). They were expected to take care of themselves. Many did, but not all.

In 1995, as a student of Political Science, I wrote a term paper on this subject (Melander 1995). I interviewed ten Headteachers about their views on G&T students. Of these, eight were of the opinion that ‘gifted children always get by’ and ‘they have no special needs’. I also interviewed eight students, aged 19-25, all of whom would have been characterised as G&T at school had the label existed: all had an average grade of 5.0 [on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the top grade], including all subjects, after having completed an academic programme at upper secondary school\(^2\) [gymnasiet]. Of these students, all had spent a considerable amount of time acting as assistants to the teachers, helping other students or running errands; and had rarely felt that the teachers considered their needs or wishes to learn. I concluded that most schools represented by the Headteachers in the study neither lived up to the targets stipulated in the steering documents, nor did they think that schools ought to allocate resources to G&T students, although the need for support was shown in the student interviews.

There have been developments since then. The chairman of the National Union of Teachers in Sweden has commented that ‘it should be permitted to be gifted in mathematics, just as it is permitted to be talented in P.E.\(^3\) and music’ (dn.se 2009, 18 May). This autumn ten upper secondary schools in Sweden have been granted permission to start focus classes\(^4\) for students with a high interest and ability in a certain subject area, e.g. history or mathematics (see 3.3). These will spend more time than usual on the respective subject. This signifies a great change in attitude. Numerous student papers have also focused on gif-

---
\(^1\) I also use the abbreviation G&T for gifted and talented education as well as for G&T children/pupils/students.
\(^2\) Upper secondary school: for students aged 16-19, a programme focusing on e.g. academic subjects (the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences) or a vocational subject is chosen. The number of subjects studied is approximately 15, some of which taken over all three years, some over one or two years.
\(^3\) Physical Education [idrott]
\(^4\) ‘Focus class’ is my term. There is not yet a set term in English (Christina Månberg, personal communication 16 October 2009). The Swedish term is spetsutbildning.
tedness; particularly over the last few years (see e.g. Hibell & Klevedal 2006; Hallenheim & Olsson 2006; Andersson & Hellström 2007; Sandström 2007; Mäki 2009).

However, little research is carried out. At Malmö University [education] library there are around five books on this topic (two written by Roland S. Persson, Professor of Educational Psychology at Jönköping University), placed in two different sections; one of them on ‘education for special groups’, which also includes e.g. multicultural education and distance education; the other one on ‘differentiation’, including gender differentiation.5

In the library at the Institute of Education in London, there are more than six metres of books in a section covering giftedness only.

Unfortunately, many people maintain that support for G&T students is a waste of resources since ‘they will get by anyway’. Persson (1997a) comments that the resistance against allocating G&T children particular resources has been remarkable ever since the 1940s (p. 22). Edfeldt & Wistedt (2009) refer to the significant amount of time spent countering myths about gifted children and mathematics that are ‘rooted and nurtured’ in the Swedish society (p. 80). A magazine published by the National Union of Teachers in Sweden had few articles covering this group and/or issue in 2008-09 (approximately 25 editions): one details the focus classes, yet voicing concerns that resources would be taken from other programmes to finance it (Tenfält 2009) and one editorial reviews the decision positively (Skolvärlden 2009). One interviewee – in an unrelated article – stresses the importance of stimulating students according to interest, ability and motivation at upper secondary school (Wermeling 2009) and there are two more brief references.6 However, these magazines include frequent articles, comments and news items about low achievers and/or their needs. One edition included five articles about issues related to low achievers.

5 Incidentally, the second and third editions of one book are placed in different sections.
6 Furthermore, one teacher columnist writes about the ‘myth’ that gifted students need teachers with good subject knowledge, stressing that the real challenge is low achievers with little interest, thus by implication perpetuating the myth that ‘gifted students will get by anyway’ (Mannerheim 2009a). The same columnist writes on an online forum about schools that ‘Of course it is inspirational when teachers are competent but principally you could be a plumber and read the course book aloud, gifted students will make it anyway /.../ The real challenge is low achieving students and students who are not motivated, as all teachers know’ [my translations] (Mannerheim 2009b). She implies that the issue of not being motivated relates to low achievers only. Her views are ubiquitous and harm the general views on gifted children. Mannerheim’s statement on ‘reading aloud from course books’ makes it clear that she is not a language teacher.
In an interview with Roland S. Persson, he refers to being called ‘bloody fascist’* by three teachers when he asked them what denotes giftedness (Nylander 2009). In a Swedish debate programme on education, *Skolfront* (20 November 2008), Göran Greider, a well-known public figure, creator of public opinion and editor of a left-wing paper, stated that he was against so-called ‘elite classes’, adding that ‘he believes in human beings who get to know other kinds of human beings’, that it would be a catastrophe ‘to put nerds in a class with more nerds’* and that he thought many of these students would get tired of the subject in question and give it up. It is disheartening that these views are still prevalent. Greider has no evidence to support his views.

As a comparison, for many years Sweden has produced more successful musicians than any similar country and is now the world’s third biggest music exporter (Regeringen [Swedish government] 2007). This is often attributed to the fact that Sweden has well developed extracurricular music education, open to all children. Had Greider been right, Sweden would have been full of people tired of music. Greider also misses the point that this is a voluntary scheme: no student will be forced to take a programme on a subject s/he is not interested in, regardless of ability. The idea is to allow students who want to spend more time on a subject and to learn more to do so. Thus, although things have changed since the mid-90s, there is still work to ascertain that that G&T students, like any other students, are challenged in school.

This thesis uses as a starting point the fact that G&T children should be supported to develop their talents, just like any other child. Little research has focused on what could be done to enforce this point of view within the education sector. There are few guidelines on how schools should organise gifted education. Most efforts are at higher levels within the education system (notably upper secondary) although many studies show the importance of supporting young G&T children (Porter 2005: *passim*; Koshy 2009:156); especially young G&T children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Casey & Koshy 2006:92). The second half of the twentieth century showed a considerable reduction in uneven recruitment to university in Sweden, which has been attributed to the late first selection point within the education system (Jonsson 1992:67). Support for young, gifted children is therefore important.

---

7 My translation; * denotes my translation throughout.
Although there is a number of focus classes, most gifted children will not attend these. Thus, all schools must ensure that all students, including G&T ones, have opportunities to develop at their own pace.

1.1 Aim and scope

Three areas are considered to constitute research around giftedness: the psychology of giftedness, professional educational practice and educational policy, with policy being the least researched area (Eyre 2009:1). Although touching upon all three, my main aim is to look into educational policy around G&T by answering the following questions:

1. The national curriculum stipulates that the education should be adapted according to each student’s needs. The needs of G&T students have been controversial. Do educators today accept the needs of gifted students and that they should be supported like any other students? (My view, based on prior knowledge, is that this is not an accepted fact.)

2. Education of G&T is a problem is all countries (Winstanley 2006:24) and how to best support them is, or should be, an issue of worldwide interest. All countries could benefit from closer co-operation and use of best practice (Winstanley 2004:xii). What could Sweden learn from England when it comes to G&T education? Other countries have implemented policies for G&T: would an explicit national policy make it easier for schools to consider this group, given financial restraints that make it necessary to prioritize, and seemingly easier to demote G&T?

I will start by presenting definitions of giftedness and detail the emergence of research in the area and the developments of gifted education in Sweden and England. My results, the view on G&T in Sweden (4.0) and England (5.0) follows as well as a comparison of factors influencing giftedness (6.0) and a discussion and recommendations (7.0) as to what could be improve the situation in Sweden conclude the thesis.
1.2 Definitions

It is neither clear exactly what group of children are referred to by using the term ‘gifted and talented’, nor is there agreement upon what terms and definitions should be used to describe them.

1.2.1 Who is gifted and talented?

Balchin (2007) noted that the different meanings of G&T was a problem for many teachers in England and made it difficult to nominate gifted children (as quoted by Balchin 2009:51). Teachers’ difficulties to identify G&T children are well-known (Baldwin 1962, Gear 1976; both as quoted by Gross 2004:18). Some teachers confuse G&T abilities with results (McClure 2006:73): a number – larger than previously thought – of gifted students underperform, sometimes due to boredom (see e.g. Wahlström 1995:41; Clark & Callow 1998:14, Gross 2004:25; Edfeldt & Wistedt 2009:80). G&T students are furthermore over-represented amongst children who dislike school (Porter 2005:217). It can be difficult to separate a bored child from a child with learning difficulties (Winner 1996:47). Some teachers see gifted programmes as rewards for good work or attitude and therefore identify less gifted, but more motivated children (Goodhew 2009:4). For a gifted child being identified as gifted may lead to a feeling of not having to work hard ‘because they are gifted’ (Balchin 2009:53) or since they get by anyway (Reis 2009:319). This misses the point: identifying children as gifted is a starting point, not the end result (Dweck 2009:312).

Teacher identification also easily leads to incorrect under-representation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Gross 2006:128): notably, programmes for G&T in the US have five times more children from the top socio-economic layer (top 25 percent) than from the lowest one (Winner 1996:205). Incorrect identification leads to a vi-

---

8 My reference is to incorrect under-representation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are more gifted and talented children in higher socio-economic groups: of children to parents who have not completed high school, 0.001 percent are expected to be gifted, whereas the figure is 4.8 percent for children with parents who have a university education (Porter 2005:114; see also Jencks 1988:526 and Gross 2004:81). Children with fewer siblings and access to more parental time are more frequently gifted (Hong & Milgram 2008:125; see also Callard-Szulgit 2003:65, Winner 1996:161 and Gross 2004:passim).

The significance of environmental factors reduces over time: living in poverty has a profound impact on IQ, but genetics become more important: intelligence in infancy is determined by nature to 20 percent, whereas by adolescence the figure has increased to 60 percent and by adulthood it is 80 percent (Gottfredson 2003, as quoted by Hong & Milgram 2008:80). Studies of identical twins raised in different environments show that they become more similar with time and even adopted children resemble their biological siblings whom they have never met (Hong & Milgram 2008:80; see also Freeman 1998:6).
cious circle: children who are treated as gifted (but who should not have been identified as such) become increasingly intelligent (Resnick 1999:39 as quoted by Claxton & Meadows 2009:7). Teachers may not realise that their initial categorisation was incorrect.

There are ethnic and cultural issues to consider: in Britain, white children are twice as likely to be identified as gifted as ethnic minorities (Warwick & Matthews 2009:266). Cases have been made that giftedness should consider inherent cultural values (see e.g. Hong & Milgram 2008:131, Eriksson 2006:4). In China, e.g., there are reported difficulties since the traditional Chinese values of giftedness do not correspond with western values (Chan 2009:121). One researcher states that ‘giftedness should be defined differently in different settings (Borland 1990:166 as quoted by Porter 2005:37) and another that ‘...high ability must be considered in terms of local social contexts if practical solutions to potential problems are to be found’ (Winstanley 2004:xiii).

Although these problems are ongoing and no perfect solution exists, this paper does not deal with the actual issue of defining G&T students. It is not necessary to define exactly who fits into the description, but it is a baseline fact that there are G&T students in all schools.

1.2.2 Terminology

The second issue relates to terminology. Different terms are preferred in different settings and countries. The UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) deploys the term G&T:

*Gifted* describes learners who have the ability to excel academically in one or more subjects such as English, drama, technology;

*Talented* describes learners who have the ability to excel in practical skills such as sport, leadership, artistic performance, or in an applied skill. (DCSF: Who is gifted and talented?)

However, this suggests an absolute unaffected by individual engagement, leading gifted students to believe they need not work hard (see e.g. Balchin 2009:53; Winstanley 2006:45). The concern of gifted children learning that ‘they are special and more entitled’ has also been mentioned, although research shows that grouping gifted children leads to in-
creased self-respect and a more realistic approach to their abilities (Gross 2004:36). An interpretation by Françoys Gagné is preferred by some:

ability to perform at a level significantly beyond what might be expected for one’s age, in any domain of human ability /.../ to a level that would place one in the top 10-15 percent of age peers. However, giftedness defines outstanding potential rather than outstanding performance. (Gagné 1995 as quoted by Gross 2006:119)

This recognises the discrepancy between ability and results and acknowledges the problem with underachieving gifted children (Gross 2006:119). Gagné also differentiates between giftedness and talent; giftedness is aptitude or potential; talent is superior performance (Gross 2004:26, 75). Motivation is not a necessary part of giftedness, but is important to show talent (Gross 2004:26).

Irish policy uses G&T, whereas Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland use ‘highly able’ (Clark 2006:288). Curiously enough, although ‘G&T’ is the norm in England, a House of Commons report in 1999 – the catalyst for interest in gifted and talented (see 3.4) – was named ‘Highly Able Children’. There is no consensus on terminology.

Similarly, there is no agreement on terms in Swedish. The term in use in 1995 – albeit sparingly – was ‘specialbegåvad’. [literal translation ‘especially gifted’, or ‘super(extra) gifted’]. Since then, Roland S. Persson has initiated the use of ‘särbegåvad’ [approx. ‘differently’, ‘distinctively’ gifted]. This is also the term used most frequently in recent student theses.

Theoretically the definitions are not overly relevant: the important thing is to ensure that this group is supported (Winstanley 2004:80), but it is easier to argue the necessity if there is a clear definition. The choice of term in a country is often linked to the understanding of the term (op.cit. p.xiii). Hence, for the implementation of policies it is important to agree on the use of a term and its definition (Porter 2005:200).

I have used gifted and talented, and G&T. These are well-known terms that most people will understand; in my view more so than ‘highly able’. I use G&T children/pupils/students interchangeably.
2.0 Material and method

Research cannot be value free (Bryman 2008:25). I have views that will inevitably influence me: my baseline is that I do not feel that G&T students in Sweden are given enough attention and that many educators neglect their needs. To ensure that my bias has had as little influence as possible I have made sure that I read many previous studies by different researchers and that I do not only present views that corroborate my view (op.cit. p. 85). I also made sure that my supervisor – who does not hold the same bias as me – endorsed all major decisions. I am aware that my views will still have influenced my methods (op.cit. p. 24).

2.1 Procedure

My methodology is based on Bryman (2008). I started by carrying out a literary review to bring myself up to date on research, look into methods used and unanswered research questions (p. 81). This review was guided by my initial research questions (op.cit. p. 69); ‘what can be said about G&T in Sweden compared with England’ and ‘what has happened in Sweden within G&T over the past 15 years’. Based on these questions I selected literature: I read all books on G&T at Malmö University library, I contacted two Swedish G&T researchers, took advice on literature and used the bibliographies in their works (op.cit. p. 96) to identify further useful material and researchers. I read numerous student papers that I found in databases and a large number of studies/books available at the Institute of Education with particular attention to recent and contemporary books. Research within the area has increased significantly since the 1980s and there is a time limit on findings (op.cit. p. 187). I also carried out extensive searches for online studies as well as material and information relating to G&T in different countries.

I have chosen to study an area that is of personal interest (op. cit. p. 69), but this is also an area that have gained a lot more societal interest recently, another relevant criterion for establishing a focus (op.cit. p. 72). My literary review made it easier to establish specific research questions. I thus acknowledged the importance of formulating my research and ensured that I found the right balance between open-ended and less open-ended research – very open ended research may confuse the focus (ibid).
Following my initial review, I started my data collection (op.cit. p. 76) parallel to the continuous review (op.cit. p. 99). I reread relevant books, started to classify findings and structure my thesis. I then carried out interviews (2.2), created questionnaires (2.3) and used the material acquired for a discussion. This was based on the arguments identified through the literary review, set against the views of my respondents and against my own conclusions (op.cit. p. 664).

2.2 Interviews

For information on current Swedish views I interviewed five of the Headteachers that I interviewed for my study in 1995. I was interested to ascertain whether any of them had a different opinion now. I am aware of the importance of using a suitable sampling method (op.cit. p. 168). At the time of my first paper the Headteachers were randomly selected to represent different secondary schools within a reasonable geographical distance and although not completely representative, their views were similar, with few exceptions.

My English respondents (six) were also chosen by convenience sample (op.cit. p. 183) and times for meetings were agreed spontaneously. It should be noted that I am acquainted with or know all of them and that I had discussed educational issues generally and/or G&T issues specifically with most of them prior to the interviews. It may be problematic to know interviewees since there might be a risk that they would try to respond in ways to please me (social desirability bias; op.cit. p. 211). However, given that they work to improve education and that they are professionals who take pride in their work, I believe that this risk was mitigated by ensuring that our communication was straight and honest. There is no dependency on me from their side.

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (op.cit. p. 196). These varieties all cover a previously agreed set of topics and the level of detail in the questions determines the category. Interviews with pre-determined questions are the main type used in survey and quantitative research (op.cit. p. 195); semi-structured interviews are considered to be the most appropriate for education research (Gross 2004:55). One reason why is that they allow for standardisation of questions and recording of answers (Bryman 2008:194) at the same time as it is possible for the interviewer to ask follow up questions and interact with the interviewee to acquire more information on specific topics.
All my interviews were semi-structured to unstructured: I had 5-7 questions (appendices 1-2) that I asked to ensure that I covered the same content (op.cit. p. 202), but respondents were also encouraged to elaborate. The order was sometimes changed and there were occasions when questions were omitted or slightly changed. All questions were open, allowing for more spontaneity (op.cit. p. 232). This gave me a lot of additional information and I have not used all information received, but only responses that relate directly to my focus (op.cit. p. 665).

Interviewing my English respondents I took notes by hand rather than using a tape recorder because they were happy to be contacted to check quotations. The interviews were short; however, a few respondents approached me afterwards to add details. In one instance an interview started in person, but was finished off via e-mail.

I wavered between meeting and interviewing my Swedish respondents on the phone, but in the end chose the latter. Phone interviews are easier to supervise and less prone to be influenced by the interviewer, but also more difficult for sensitive questions, unlikely to be longer than 20-25 minutes and the observation element is cut (op.cit. p. 198). Since I had few questions (appendix 2) that were not sensitive my stance was that the convenience of carrying out phone interviews outweighed the possible disadvantages. When I called, most respondents agreed to talk to me then, but for some other times were scheduled. The interviews were 15-20 minutes long. The fact that they were not long meant that it was easy to take notes without relying on recordings. Following the interviews I transcribed the responses immediately and later summarised them into one document that I linked to my theoretical questions and compared.

2.3 Questionnaires

I wanted to compare the Headteachers’ views with those of respondents who had not previously been questioned on this topic and carried out a survey (appendix 3) with eight teachers. Interviews with pre-determined questions and questionnaires are in many ways similar (op.cit. p. 217), however the wording of the questionnaires being particularly important (ibid). There are no interviewer effects and the risk of a social desirability bias is reduced (op.cit. p. 218). Disadvantages with questionnaires include the lack of opportunities to ask for additional information, the risk of respondents tiring, the fact that respondents can read all questions before answering and the greater risk of missing information (ibid).
I chose to carry out surveys since I wanted to get more responses than otherwise would have been possible and estimated that it would be more convenient for respondents to answer in their own time (ibid). I mitigated the risk of respondent fatigue by asking few, clear questions; this also increased the likelihood that I would get more responses (ibid): although I asked respondents myself, I still did not expect all to return their questionnaires, but all did.

The respondents were randomly selected within two schools: one upper secondary school which offers the prestigious International Baccalaureate (IB) programme and is reputed to have a large proportion of G&T, which makes it reasonable to expect most teachers to have encountered G&T students. The other school is a secondary school that used setting\(^9\) in some subjects already at the time of my previous paper. The former Headteacher of this school was one of my respondents in 1995. By electing to carry out surveys in schools where it is more likely that there is an awareness of G&T than schools in general I accept that I will not get representative responses; but I also ensure that the respondents have sufficient knowledge to respond (op.cit. p. 243). Because of this, it is less of an issue that I use convenience sampling: I do not attempt to make generalised statements, but only to provide an indicator to further research (op.cit. p. 183) and further policy studies. However, I mitigate the risk that I exaggerate the lack of awareness of the issue; if anything, my results may indicate a higher awareness than is actually the case.

Although the sampling frame (all possible respondents in the cohort, op.cit. p. 168) consists of all teachers in the schools and questionnaires were handed out randomly there is a sampling bias: I was more prone to hand them out to teachers I knew or was put in contact with, which meant that some teachers were unlikely to be selected (op.cit. p. 169).

The questions asked were mainly open to let respondents answer in their own words and to allow for unusual responses (op.cit. p. 232). Some questions were taken directly or partly from a questionnaire used by Roland S. Persson (Persson 1997b, pp 83-88); a method suggested by Bryman (2008:248), which means that they had been tried and tested. Wording a question proposing a national policy presented some challenges because it is a new concept and it was important to address it directly. I acknowledge that it may be seen

\(^9\) Setting: pupils are grouped according to ability on a subject-by-subject basis (Goodhew 2009:39).
as leading, however, my conclusions will only indicate a way forward and since this is a major difference between G&T in England and Sweden it provided necessary input.

2.4 Other material

I have also looked into other countries’ policies, focusing on England\textsuperscript{10} and have been in contact with a State Secretary at the Swedish Department for Education and a Director of Education at the Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket] to learn more about planned initiatives and current views on G&T. I contacted them via phone and e-mail. Some responses I received were brief and would more count as statements on particular issues.

2.5 Ethical considerations

My thesis did not have any particular ethical implications. All Headteachers and teachers made a choice to participate. Since the questionnaire was anonymous I did not use any consent forms but ensured that the information given on the questionnaire was sufficient.

The Swedish Research Council has set up four criteria that researchers should adhere to whilst using respondents for research: information, agreement, confidentiality and usage (The Swedish Research Council 1990:6\textsuperscript{11}). Information relates to the duty of the researcher to inform the respondents of the purpose of the study. All respondents were informed of the aim of the study and how their contribution would be used. I do recognise that it is difficult or impossible to present participants with all information that would be required to make a completely informed decision about taking part (Bryman 2008:121) but I have not deceived anyone as to the purpose of my study (op.cit. p. 124).

The second criterion relates to agreement. All respondents volunteered and were informed that they could change their minds about participating (The Swedish Research Council 1990:7). The importance of ensuring that no respondents feel obliged to participate is also stressed (op.cit. p. 10). Although I am acquainted with my English respondents, nobody was under any pressure to participate. There were many possible respondents and the omission of someone would not have hindered my study. Everyone was aware of this;

\textsuperscript{10} Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate policies.

\textsuperscript{11} Please note that this is the latest version of these guidelines.
two Swedish teachers chose not to participate; one commenting on the difficulty of categorising G&T children.

Confidentiality refers to respondents’ right to remain anonymous. All respondents are anonymous and their names will remain confidential (op. cit. p. 12), protecting their privacy and further reducing the risk that anyone might feel mislead (Bryman 2008:118). Information has been stored using a computer, but it is not possible for anyone else to access it (The Swedish Research Council 1990:12).

The fourth criterion, usage, refers to the requirement that material gathered for research is only used for research (op. cit. p. 14). No information received will be used for any other purpose. I also followed the recommendation that respondents should be asked if they want to receive a copy of the results (op. cit. p. 15).

3.0 Theoretical framework and literary review

This chapter will provide information on the development of G&T in Sweden and England and form a background to my study. Since one of my questions relates to policy, I have examined research on policy to inform myself of factors relating to the establishment of new policies.

3.1 A theoretical background to policy analysis

Policy analysis covers the study of policy content, (describes and explains the development of particular policies), policy process (focuses on how policy decisions are made and how policies are shaped); information for policy making, (gathering of data to assist policy makers) and policy advocacy (promoting specific options) (Hill 2005:5). The study of policy can also relate to examining non-decisions (op. cit. p. 8). My paper does not constitute a complete policy study since the focus is not confined to one area. Instead, I aim to detail various issues surrounding G&T and G&T policy: explaining what has happened within the area when, how it happened and what can be done to strengthen it. Nevertheless, because of its relation with policy analysis and the potential implications for public policy, a theoretical background touching on policy analysis is appropriate.

Having a policy means to have a set of goals as well as plans regarding what to do to reach these goals (Bryder 2004:i). Policy sciences analyse processes of decision-
making at individual, institutional, organisational and societal levels \cite{op.cit. p. 6}. Although G&T research touches upon all levels, this paper mainly covers the institutional and societal level (schools and governments/countries). Policy is action oriented and focuses on what we should do and is often initiated as a response to a problem \cite{Goodin, Rein & Moran 2006:6-7}. The baseline policy for this thesis is the Swedish National Curriculum which stipulates that education shall be adapted to each pupil’s preconditions and needs \cite{3.3}. Had this policy been implemented I could have focused upon implementation alone. My contribution is to ensure that the existing policy fulfils its purpose. Since there is information to suggest that it has not been implemented in full, this thesis will explore the current views of educators, which might give information on needs to address to fulfil the intentions of the policy. Furthermore, it will look into the making of policy and the point of delivery.

There is limited scope within politics to test theories. Because of this, international comparisons are one way of looking at a situation in different contexts \cite{Hill 2005:92}. They are crucial for the development of policy theory in order to avoid policy analyses only being observations about occurrences in one particular place and time \cite{ibid}. For this reason, I have used international best practice to compare the development of G&T in Sweden.

The policy implementation stage has a bigger than usual impact within education since it is implemented in thousands of classrooms daily and decision-makers must rely on all teachers to interpret the policy objectives and implement them \cite{op.cit. p. 125-6}. Thus, implementation takes place all the time as well as evaluation is continuous \cite{Municio 1995:5}. These processes will influence each other. If decision-makers and teachers are not in agreement, the policy will fail and more information is needed on the input side.

3.2 The emergence of G&T research
My aim is not to detail G&T research or to extensively describe the importance of supporting G&T education, but brief backgrounds are necessary.

In the nineteenth century, Galton’s view that intelligence was genetically inherited and measurable became the norm \cite{Eyre 1999:2}. The first definition of giftedness was based on its relationship to IQ \cite{Feldman 2003:9}. More recently intelligence has been seen as a series of ‘intelligences’ linked to a range of factors \cite{Eyre 1999:2}. Howard Gardner is probably the most well-known advocate, however, his views have been distorted and
worked to the detriment of G&T: Gardner acknowledges that his idea is a matter for specu-
lation more than proof and has been heavily criticized by psychometric and intelligence ex-
perts (Gross 2004:115). His proposal has led to a view that ‘everyone is gifted in some-
thing’ and to some teachers not accepting that children can be gifted in many areas as well
( *ibid* ). This is not correct: everyone has certain relative *strengths*, but not everyone is gifted
( *op.cit.*, *passim*; see also Porter 2005:111). 10 percent of all children have IQs of 120 or
more and 1 percent have IQs of 140 or more (Simonton 2009:27); it is generally agreed that
5-10 percent of the population can be termed gifted (Gross 2004:30).

Research is divided on whether G&T children are usually gifted in everything
or in one area. Gross (2004) writes that although some G&T are gifted in one particular
area, most are gifted in several areas (p. 114). However, Goodhew (2009) writes that it is a
myth that G&T children are good at most subjects (p. 11) and Moltzen (2006) states that
few G&T children are outstanding across the board (p. 45). There is thus research support-
ing both views but for the purpose of this paper it is enough to accept that there are G&T
students.

A 1930s longitudinal study of 1,528 gifted children warned that they were at
risk socially: a 6-year old-with an IQ of 180 has the knowledge and skills of an average 11-
year-old, and a gifted 11-year-old is close to an average high school graduate’s skills
(Burks, Jensen & Terman 1930 as quoted by Gross 2009:492). Burks et al concluded that a
‘child of 180 IQ has one of the most difficult problems of social adjustment that any human
being is ever called upon to meet’ (as quoted by Gross 2004:16). Hollingworth (1942)
found that most G&T children (up to IQs of 150) could be catered for in normal schools
assuming provision of ‘high quality teaching’ (as quoted by Montgomery 2006:182). This
was not the norm, though.

In the 1920s and 30s, it was more common to enable children to accelerate
(skip a year of school) (Gross 2009:494). For others, G&T needs were filled, dependent on
the individual teacher, within the classroom. However, various studies have looked into the
ability span within a classroom and found that it can be as much as five-six years (see e.g.
Coorey 1998 as quoted by Gross 2006:124; Porter 2005:214). This is recognised as the
greatest challenge for any teacher (Eyre 2006:161).
It was long believed that G&T students preferred working on their own (Whitmore 1980:154). This was ascribed the ‘G&T personality’ (French & Shore 2009:176) and was an easy solution for teachers. In a mixed ability classroom G&T students may not feel supported; they are different, which forces them to work on their own – it becomes a default option; there is no alternative if they wish to work at their natural pace; and is not a choice (Whitmore 1980, 1986 as quoted by French & Shore 2009:180).

During the 1960s-70s little research focused on gifted students due to the ‘egalitarian ethos’ (Gross 2004:21). The realisation that G&T students are as heterogeneous as any cohort of children may have lead to the increased research into how to accommodate them. Many ways of accommodating G&T’s needs have now been analysed and researched, originally with a focus on separating them, but lately concentrating on how to include them in the standard classroom. G&T history is parallel to that of special education (op.cit. p. 10), however, G&T is still often considered a superfluous special need that does not require attention as urgently as e.g. dyslexia (Balchin 2009:52). Once acknowledged, it became possible to consider G&T needs for special education. The interest in and increased knowledge about SEN meant that different groups were often put against each other. In the mid-90s, out of the US budget for education, 0.02 percent was spent on G&T education (Sternberg 1996 as quoted by Porter 2005:111); the equivalent of $1 per G&T child per year (Ford, D.Y., Russo, C.J. & Harris, J.J. 1993 as quoted by Porter 2005:111-2). To get an understanding for the small amount spent on G&T, the same source states that 33 percent of the budget was spent on other special needs. If the education system is intended to include all children, G&T must be seen as a part of it (Campbell, Muijs, Neelands, Robinson, Eyre and Hewston 2009b:323). The general view has been that G&T matters, but not as much as other needs (Porter 2005:107).

The differences between moderate and exceptional giftedness have increasingly divided researchers. Winner (1996) argues that supporting this group is even more important than ‘standard’ G&T students, since it is comparatively easier for teachers to adapt their teaching to suit the ‘standard’ G&T group (p. 228). Some argue that there is little point in differentiating between the top gifted students: some argue that the top 10-20 percent could be included in G&T support systems (Reis & Renzulli 1982 and Renzulli 1982 as quoted by Porter 2005:28); others assert that if G&T initiatives were aimed at as
large a group as the top 10-20 percent, it would not be useful for the exceptionally gifted children (*ibid*). The range of abilities within the G&T group is wide: a profoundly gifted child (IQ of 180+; fewer than 1:1 million) is as different from a moderately gifted child as the latter is from intellectually disabled children (Gross 2004:7). It is increasingly contended that policies for moderately gifted cannot cover the profoundly gifted, since they are as different from the moderately gifted as the moderately gifted are from average children (Winner 2009:311). Measures and policies should therefore ideally be different for the two groups.

G&T has been an overlooked aspect of education policy (Eyre 2009:9), but the interest has increased (*op.cit. p. 10*). Some countries have agreed more or less clear-cut policies regarding G&T (e.g. Scotland and New Zealand); many countries experiment with different ways of accommodating G&T needs and information about the psychological effects of being gifted is increasingly widespread (Jackson 2004:29).

**3.3 Gifted and Talented Education in Sweden**

The education system in Sweden long consisted of two systems catering for two social classes: local schools attended by poorer children, whereas children from more affluent families and higher socio-economic groups attended selective schools leading to higher education (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000:56). In the late nineteenth century, arguments were brought forward that everyone should attend local schools and it was decided that entry to the selective schools would be deferred so that all children would first attend local schools for three years. Following a test, most children who were offered places at the selective schools were from higher socio-economic groups. The other children were unlikely to have access to higher education.

The Swedish curriculum from 1920 encourages teachers to adjust the contents and complexity of their teaching according to the children’s abilities, without specifying who this is aimed at (Persson 1997a:21). Over the course of the century, the references to abilities disappeared (*ibid*). In 1962, the national school board maintained the importance of adjusting the teaching, but restricting it to the standard classroom (*ibid*). Since there was little research on the importance of meeting G&T needs, little was done in practice in most classrooms and few considerations were made (see e.g. Melander 1995, Persson 1997b).
In the mid-1940s a discussion on the then selection point started. Selective school supporters wanted early differentiation, arguing that good education could only take place in homogenous groups (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000:48). Local school supporters contended that later selection would benefit working class children (ibid). Agreement was eventually reached to establish a comprehensive school of nine years for all children. The new system was incorporated in 1961 and was the only option for decades: there were a very limited number of independent schools until well into the 1990s. Everyone else attended the local comprehensive school, without the choice of moving since catchments were fixed. In the 1940s one argument used was that the most important task for schools is to give everyone the same opportunity to education, irrespective of their socio-economic background (op.cit. p. 47). It was argued that the class divide persisted because of the difficulties for poor children to get an education (ibid). The view that everyone should attend the same school is connected to the Swedish maxim that ‘everyone is equal’, which is a different matter. The current Minister of Education, Jan Björklund, commented that it used to be the aim in Sweden that everyone should be given equal opportunities, a ‘first class’ ticket on the train, whereas later this changed to efforts to accomplish equality by banning first class cars (Leijonborg & Björklund 2002:27).

In 1992, a new school choice policy made it easier for independent schools to be set up. A ‘voucher system’ was created, meaning that the funding for a child follows him/her to the school s/he wishes to attend (the ‘free school’ system). All schools must follow the national curriculum. The intention was that by allowing different types of schools, parents would have more choice (Lindbom 2007:16). This changed Swedish education: the number of free schools has increased significantly since the reform: from 238 schools/20,247 students in 1995/6 to 677 schools/89,444 students in 2008/9 (The Swedish National Agency for Education 2009b). Since all schools must follow the national curriculum, few schools stand out as significantly different. Ability selection is not permitted.

In 1994, new national curricula for the compulsory school (Lpf94) and for the upper secondary (voluntary) school (Lpo94) were agreed. These state clearly that the education should be adapted to each student’s needs:
Education shall be adapted to each pupil’s preconditions and needs. (Curriculum for the Non-Compulsory School System (Lpf 94): paragraph 1, An equivalent education)

Education should be adapted to each pupil’s circumstances and needs. Based on the pupils’ background, earlier experiences, language, and knowledge, it should promote the pupils’ further learning and acquisition of knowledge. (Curriculum for the Compulsory School System (Lpo 94): paragraph 1, An equivalent education)

This was in line with the European Council’s recommendation (1994) on education for gifted children:

1. The Assembly reaffirms education as a fundamental human right, and believes that it should, as far as possible, be appropriate to each individual.

2. Whereas for practical purposes education systems must be set up so as to provide adequate education for the majority of children, there will always be children with special needs and for whom special arrangements have to be made. One group of such children is that of the highly gifted.

3. Gifted children should be able to benefit from appropriate educational conditions that would allow them to develop fully their abilities, for their own benefit and for the benefit of society as a whole. /...

i. legislation should recognise and respect individual differences. Highly gifted children, as with other categories, need adequate educational opportunities to develop their full potential; (European Council 1994: Recommendation (sic) 1248 (1994) 1 on education for gifted children)

Thus, even at the time of my thesis in 1995, G&T needs should have been considered; however, the paragraphs in the national curricula have not generally been used for G&T, but for children with learning difficulties e.g. In 1995, very few of the Headteachers interviewed had any regard to G&T, whether in theory, or as measured by actions taken. Persson (1997a) states that although schools generally consider children’s needs, G&T
children are stuck in a situation where their needs have become a political issue, instead of an educational one (p. 269).

The International Encyclopedia of Education writes that in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century the Swedish state ‘lost its legal support’ for allowing the neglect of G&T to continue (as quoted by Edfeldt & Wistedt 2009:76), meaning the new curricula in 1994. Until the turn of the century, however, no measures were taken to rectify the position. In 2001, the first G&T training of teachers took place as an experiment (ibid). In 2002, government allocated 2 million SEK for G&T education leading to a research project on mathematics and G&T (www.giftedmath.se). This mathematics project is the first of its kind in Sweden. It is based on the fact that although there are students gifted in mathematics, they are often not given any opportunity to develop since their books provide little challenge (ibid). The aim is to

\begin{quote}
    further our understanding of how mathematical abilities can be developed innovatively within ordinary classrooms as well as in virtual settings where modern technology can be used to create collaborative math-learning communities among high-ability students (ibid).
\end{quote}

The current Minister of Education has shown a keen interest in G&T. Prior to his appointment\textsuperscript{12}, he stated that

\begin{quote}
    children are different and learn at different speeds; the thought that everyone should learn at an average speed means that some are left behind and others are not motivated.* (Leijonborg & Björklund 2002:53).
\end{quote}

During his tenure, as mentioned, focus classes in upper secondary school with an extra emphasis on one or two subjects have been established; catering for students who want to spend more time studying this particular subject in addition to the other subjects within their chosen upper secondary school programme. They started in 2009 at ten schools across Sweden\textsuperscript{13} and students will have opportunities to take university courses in the respective

\textsuperscript{12} Minister of Schools 2006-2007; Minister of Education 2007-\
\textsuperscript{13} The following subjects are covered: mathematics (two); physics; history; mathematics and natural sciences; global social sciences; biomedicine; social sciences with an emphasis on individuals and contemporary culture; humanities and science.
subject area. In 2010, ten further schools will be granted permission to establish focus classes. It was generally expected that these classes would appeal to G&T students:

*the focus educations will give upper secondary students with the necessary abilities for mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences or the arts respectively incentives to further develop their knowledge.* (Swedish National Agency for Education:2009a)

Contrary to the expectations some programmes were undersubscribed. One reason was that they were introduced shortly before the application deadline. Another may have been that they were spread out; it may not be practical for a 15-year old student to go to school far away from home irrespective of interest or ability. Even so, this initiative constitutes a clear attempt to address the needs of G&T and has raised the profile considerably.

G&T has been a taboo subject in Sweden over the last 100 years that has hardly been discussed, both due to it being politically incorrect and due to a genuine, but incorrect, view, that G&T students did not have any special needs (meaning that G&T students do not, like other children, have a need to be challenged, stimulated and encouraged). Edfeldt (1992) articulated it in this way:

*In Sweden it is considered undemocratic not only to be mentally gifted, but also to be mentally gifted and demand special treatment because of this fact. And to be classified as undemocratic is in Sweden to be stigmatized with the horrible eighth amendment to the Seven Deadly Sins. /.../ Ergo, there are, at least since 1968, no special treatment for the specially talented school children.*

In a 1987 teacher magazine Torsten Edquist unambiguously indicates the general attitude:

*if we choose to make special and separate provision for the highly able /.../ we must also consider whether we are prepared to accept the future society resulting from such a measure* (as quoted by Persson 1997b:17).

This quote signifies a reasonably typical view of the time.
3.4 Gifted and Talented Education in England

In England G&T education was long not high on the agenda. G&T students in ordinary schools were not subject to any particular measures. However, England long had an ‘alibi’ in that there were selective grammar schools that G&T students could apply to and transfer to after a test taken at 11 years of age. These schools, established in 1944, were expected to teach the most gifted children. There is also a tradition of independent schools for children with parents with financial resources and/or further ambitions. Although there is no exact correlation between socioeconomic status and giftedness, there are more gifted children in the higher socioeconomic strata (see footnote 8). The grammar schools were based on a belief that intelligence was innate and selection therefore natural: different schools would meet the needs of different children (Eyre 1999:2).

Comprehensive schools were introduced for all in the 1960s, based on a change in opinion about education; epitomising the view that education should be based on equality of opportunity, but focusing on the lower and middle end of the ability span (McClure 2006:69). It was acknowledged that viewing intelligence as static was incorrect (Eyre 1999:2). There are well-known examples of people who failed their selection tests but who became highly successful in various fields: their successes meant either that the test could not measure intelligence correctly, or that intelligence could develop over time (Eyre 1999:2-3).

The grammar schools remained in parallel, but a few years later it was decided that there would be no new ones, based on a belief that it was an unfair system and that it had not been successful in the country as a whole, even if it may have been successful for individuals (Eyre 1999:v). A change in government tweaked the decision: existing schools would be allowed to continue, but no new ones would be opened (BBC 1998). There are still 164 grammar schools today.

Most G&T children were then educated in ordinary comprehensives, although many schools did not know how to support them (Eyre 1999:2-3). Some local activities were created, sometimes for a whole area after regular school hours and some Local Education Authorities [kommuner] appointed advisers for G&T education (op.cit. p. 1). Since there were still grammar schools in some areas, these were less likely to offer
anything for G&T students in comprehensives (McClure 2006:69). Apart from that, the needs of G&T were largely ignored (Eyre 1999:v).

In 1981, an ‘Assisted Places Scheme’ was set up to fund G&T students to go to private schools. Although a positive attempt, the scheme only targeted 1 percent of the school population (Eyre 1999:v). An additional concern in the late 1980s was disproportionate representation from disadvantaged groups, such as children from the working class, children of the unemployed, and black and Asian families (Edwards, T., Fitz, J. & Whitty, G. 1989 as quoted by Freeman 1998:49; see also Sternberg 1996 as quoted by Winstanley 2004:44). The scheme ceased to accept new students in 1997.

When the national curriculum was established in the mid-1980s, there was little awareness of the extent of different G&T levels which meant that it included a top level that nobody was expected to reach (Paule 2006:299).

There was no national strategy until the 1990s. G&T was still considered to be neglected by many, whereas others contended that the whole education system was built around their needs, using the academic GCSEs\textsuperscript{14} as evidence (Eyre 1999:1). However, some activities did take place on a national level: two booklets published by the National Association for Able Children in Education in 1995 and 1996, ‘School Governors and Highly Able children’ (Eyre 1995) and ‘Highly Able Girls & Boys’ (Freeman 1996) were sponsored and distributed by the then Department for Education and Employment. This was the result of a realisation that there were far more G&T students than estimated (Eyre 1999:vi).

A report by a House of Commons Committee in 1999, \textit{Highly Able Children}, noted that ‘most schools are not doing enough for their highly able pupils’ and called for a national strategy (Education and Employment Committee 1999, 28 April). This report provided a starting point for a new national strategy (McClure 2006:70) and since then G&T has been an aspect considered in all new governmental initiatives (Paule 2006:298). Over the last ten years a large number of initiatives have taken place:

- G&T has been included in the national strategy and in the national White Paper ‘Every Child Matters’

\textsuperscript{14} General Certificate of Secondary Education: exams on leaving school at age 15.
- G&T co-ordinators have been appointed in (first) all Local Authorities and now in all schools
- the Departments for Education\(^\text{15}\) have published strategies for G&T
- the departmental web site has a section with advice on G&T and guides for every subject
- schools are obliged to identify a certain percentage of students as G&T and take measures to help them
- there is a national register for G&T
- regional centres providing local learning opportunities have been established (all above bullet points Goodhew 2009:x)
- G&T is now included in schools’ self-evaluation (Wilson 2009:242)

An initiative called ‘Excellence in Cities’ (EiC) was also created, aiming to ‘try to resolve the educational problems of inner cities that successive governments have failed to resolve’ (National Literacy Trust), one strand of which focused on programmes to stretch the most able 5-10 percent of pupils. Two thirds of the pupils should be identified based on academic ability; remaining places were also open to those with talents in art, music, P.E. etc. Since this focus was new, few teachers had previous experiences and training programmes were set up. Although an ambitious programme, it was not wholly successful due to the ubiquitous conflict between equality and excellence. When evaluated by Ofsted\(^\text{16}\) in 2004, it was commented that

*A small number of schools believed that the gifted and talented strand of the programme was not conducive to promoting equal opportunities. Such schools diluted the allocated resources by spending them on generic enrichment activities rather than on raising the attainment of higher-attaining and underachieving pupils.*

(Ofsted 2004)

\(^{15}\) Department for Education and Skills until 2007; Department for Children, Schools and Families as of 2007

\(^{16}\) Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills: national body that carries out school inspections.
Some schools also claimed that they did not have any G&T students in their schools (McClure 2006:73); some teachers were still reported to claim that ‘they will get by anyway’ expressing a wish to put the efforts into ‘the ones who need it’ (op.cit. p 72). There was also no consistency: a student identified as G&T in one school might not be included if s/he moved to another school (Goodhew 2009:4).

The UK government has also recently identified a sub-group: the exceptionally gifted (Goodhew 2009:5), acknowledging research that highlights the wide span between ‘normal’ G&T students and the exceptional ones.

4.0 Findings: Views on G&T in England

I have spoken to six English educators (ex-Headteachers and senior education managers) to investigate their views on G&T in England generally and on G&T policies specifically. I have divided the discussions into two areas: needs and policy.

4.1 Needs

All respondents stressed the importance of catering for G&T; one stressing the importance of creating opportunities within all subjects, i.e. P.E. and arts as well as academic subjects. It was notable that all considered G&T children to have the same rights as any children to have their needs fulfilled and to meet challenges. One comment catches the essence of what was said:

*Gifted and talented students should be considered just like any other students, they need to develop too, so it is not a matter of giving them better of anything but only to give them the same opportunity to develop as everyone else.*

Another respondent commented that it is as important as any special need, but preferred not to call it a special need and instead used ‘personalised learning’. The point of equality was mentioned and everyone’s right to make progress:

*If people have differing starting points or capacity to be able to make progress then they have the right to be able to do so. As adults we expect to be able to move at an*
appropriate pace and have a starting level that is in line with our experience and understanding. In the event that we were being constantly held back, we would not stand for it because we value our time and would get annoyed.

One respondent commented on the importance of G&T for society as a whole, in addition to the significance for the individual:

In terms of the national economy, it is important that people of high ability are able to flourish /.../ Although more people are getting higher grades, there is no evidence that the population is getting more educated. /.../ A small percentage of people pay nearly all of the income tax in the UK and it is therefore important that high achievers are supported in doing well in education and move into the workplace in a position to move into driving roles in the economy.

On the long-term problem of catering for all in English schools, one respondent commented that for a long time the middle group was in focus in schools and high and low achievers were neglected, but that low achievers increasingly got more attention, however gifted children did not.

4.2 A national policy

The views were more mixed on the national policy. Although nobody commented on any negative effects, only two felt that it had been successful in its current format and that it drove up achievement. The EiC programme was said to have been created to support inner city schools to get the most of G&T students, acknowledging that there may be some in every school, instead of expecting them to go to independent schools to be challenged. This was seen as a sound baseline for the programme. The EiC’s requirement that a constant percentage of children should be identified per school, however, introduced questionable institutional variation upon the idea of ’G&T’. It was said to be an artificial measure and that it would have been better to have the option to have different criteria in different schools. One respondent said that
There should not be any need for specific G&T policies since differentiated education should be enough to cater for everyone’s needs, including G&T children. But this is not the case. There are not enough resources to cater for all children and too big groups.

Another view was that policies and programmes are too centralised, ‘but there is an approach at least’. There was general consensus that measures for G&T need to happen on a school level and that setting of national policies alone cannot make it happen: ‘there is no way of controlling that on a national level’. Nevertheless, all respondents acknowledged that a national policy can provide a baseline for schools to work from. ‘Policies help when we evaluate provision; since we know that we need to report on it’, which means that schools are obliged to consider them. Another view was that focusing on G&T helps all learners to get to a baseline:

The curriculum needs to support all. We need to get the bottom up and get everyone to a baseline but G&T helps us focus and go further. (as confirmed by e.g. Clark and Callow 1998:58)

From the education management point of view, one person concluded that

having a national policy is one step in the direction of supporting schools and making them do something since they have to report on G&T as a group.

One comment was also made that since EiC ended it has been difficult to keep up the good work that did take place, that current measures are disjointed and that there is a lack of knowledge on what to do and how. This ties in with another comment regarding the mistreatment of G&T: the responsibility for G&T had been passed around to the extent that ‘everyone within education has been responsible at some point’, leading to it not being prioritised.

Two further issues mentioned around current G&T provision were the lack of measures for younger children and the problem around some teachers’ approach to G&T (‘particularly in socialist environments’) since they are more keen to help children in most
need of help, as defined by low attainment. This approach means that G&T students are easily disregarded even if they achieve far below their abilities. Current measures focus on secondary children and this was seen to be too late to make an impact (as confirmed by e.g. Porter 2005: passim, Koshy 2009:156). One respondent commented that his daughter (aged 6) had been identified as G&T in her school, but that this had only lead to factual statements in her term reports and no actual measures, which he felt was meaningless.

5.0 Findings: Views on G&T in Sweden

My Swedish material comes from interviews with Headteachers, questionnaires with teachers and information from the Swedish National Agency for education, a State Secretary and a Professor of Education.

5.1 Headteachers

By speaking to the Swedish Headteachers whom I interviewed in 1995, I looked into whether their views had changed or not and if they had changed, what made them change their minds as well as if they have an opinion on the possible establishment of an official policy on G&T. All remained Headteachers for many years after the first round of interviews, but only two still work within the education sector as Headteachers or similar. Some had retired and one works elsewhere, but all remained in education for many years after 1995, making it possible for me to look into attitude changes. For ease of reference I will continue to refer to them as Headteachers.

5.1.1 Current attitude

There was a striking difference in the attitude towards G&T now compared with 1995. In contrast to their earlier comments, all now acknowledged the importance of children being stimulated at their own level; ‘we accept them much more now’*. However, although few remembered what they had said in 1995, not all recognised that they had changed their views (although one said that my interview had sparked an interest in the issue). Instead they mainly referred to general societal changes making it easier to consider this group now, ‘the media attention given to G&T has lead to increased support for them’. ‘Survival

---

17 Aged 11-15
of the fittest”, the attention given to the strongest person winning was also mentioned and
the logical consequence that this would hold for education as well [thus assuming that
fittest when it comes to achievement is the measure]. One Headteacher commented that

It is about a view on human beings, that you have to accept that there are people
who are more gifted than you, and also less gifted than you, and that we have to
support all of them to find their place in life.∗

Comments were made about the significance of internationalisation: we need international
coopération and to assert our position, the EU has influenced the attitudes; there is a global
emphasis on knowledge in the western world; and an increased societal emphasis on school
results. The new [to Sweden] IB education was also mentioned as one factor driving
change. All thought that this development would persist and increase in importance. The
focus classes were mentioned as another example of the change in attitude, as was the
current government:

the Liberal Party can do what they want with education as long as they stay away
from money allocation, which Moderaterna [right-wing political party; both in
government] preside over. I do not agree with absolutely everything they do;
seemingly they think that if we recreate the school we had one time we’ll get the
same results as then, but we won’t.∗

Additionally, recent technological developments that enable online teaching resources were
claimed to facilitate G&T provision. Another point was made relating to the increased
availability of choice:

It is a sign of our time that we have gone from not choosing anything to choosing
everything. /.../ So we have created young people that we have forced or duped into
thinking that you have to be allowed to choose everything. /.../ Because choice is
encouraged at all levels I think it will have to end with the creation of measures
aimed at G&T students too.∗
The change in societal attitude was seen as positive. One Headteacher commented that it had made it possible to cater for this group and that this had been greatly appreciated by parents. However, although the needs for G&T were said to be important, two Headteachers made caveats that ‘it should not be at the expense of low achievers’, thus continuing to put G&T needs against the needs of children with difficulties. One Headteacher stressed that the terminology should not be the same for G&T and low achievers:

\[\text{I think we should say that we don’t want to restrain gifted students compared to supporting low achievers. For example, if there is a student who is good at maths and wants to continue working, it is easy to be tempted to stop them because ‘we’ll do that next week’, but if anyone wants to continue we need to let them, we need to sustain their curiosity and appetite.\ldots/ And then you have the ones who are not as interested and that is where you need to use or energy, to encourage them.}\]

Another respondent is of the same view, commenting that

\[\text{it is easier to get by if you are gifted than if you are a low achiever so that is why it is more important to concentrate on the weak ones after all}\]

These comments illustrate the common, traditional resistance against accepting G&T students as a group in need and shows that the respondents, although having accepted that all students have needs, are still more inclined to assist low achievers. The situation referred to in the first quotation, where students are allowed to continue working on their own, is similar to the situation that G&T students have found themselves in for years. It does not acknowledge that G&T students need support and encouragement.

5.1.2 Focus classes

Focus classes were generally seen as positive as long as they are not created at the expense of other programmes. One Headteacher said that s/he had started focus classes in P.E. at one school and that s/he would have liked to go to a focus class in history him/herself. The reason why P.E. was chosen was that a sports organisation approached the school and suggested it. Other subjects were considered, but were not actual options; it was ‘too early’ for
that. The fact that the focus classes are at upper secondary school, i.e. outside the compulsory school, was also stressed by one respondent as a reason why it was easier, or even possible, to create them. One comment was made that

\[\text{it is an investment that I would say is right, one could argue that we’re creating nerds out of them, but at least you give attention to students with special interests, which is good, and not only within sports, which we have had for a long time. /.../ There are pros and cons but if you add them you’ll end on a positive note. And for the individual it is definitely positive most of the time, although I am not as convinced about the end result for society as a whole. It also ties in with the free schools changing the face of education, what with their increased emphasis on results. With the new free schools we are creating a segregated education system.}\]

It is notable that nobody had any strong opinions against focus classes.

5.1.3 A national policy?

When it comes to the proposal to have a national policy for G&T, only one was unconditionally in favour. Another felt that there is already one, since the curriculum states that all children should be catered for according to their abilities. One Headteacher anticipated a proliferation of policies for all student groups that would be divisive rather than beneficial. Another said that it would be

\[\text{dangerous to categorise students as gifted or weak and give them different curricula /.../ we should have a target oriented curriculum, the fact that some will have to do more is fine, but the targets should be the same.}\]

One Headteacher commented on the need to have objective grounds for giftedness and implied the difficulties this would lead to if a policy were created: when s/he moved from one school to another, s/he realised that what s/he considered to have been gifted students in the first school would not have counted as such in the second. One respondent said that in a way it would be beneficial to have a policy since G&T students are often left alone:
That could mean that their giftedness could be strengthened, it has to do with self esteem, some are put down because they do not get a positive view of themselves, it is not bad to be gifted.*

It was also stressed that any policy would have to be nationwide, or else ‘there would be a lot of trouble’*. A general difficulty with policies as such was also noted:

* I’m sure there wouldn’t be anything wrong with a national policy, but it is always difficult; nowadays it is difficult for the ones on top to say ‘do this or do that’, there was greater obedience and submission before, whereas now there are so many national and local decrees that it is difficult to keep track on everything schools are supposed to do.*

5.1.4 Other comments

Some Headteachers stressed that it is important for all students to be taught in ways that suit them, i.e. that schools can offer multiple learning styles and the need for professional development for teachers to cater for differing needs.

Some referred to the higher importance of catering for G&T in subjects like mathematics and science. This was partly based on the respondents in question being mathematics/science teachers and partly based on a view that Sweden needs more people educated within these subjects. Two respondents talked about the importance of supporting G&T students for the future of Sweden. The fact that nowadays it is easier for students to accelerate and take upper secondary courses at secondary school, or university courses at upper secondary, was also stressed. This used to take place in extremely rare cases, but is now easier. Maths was thought to be the subject where this happens most frequently.

5.2 Teachers

All respondents had worked as teachers for at least eight years. All but one stated that they had taught students that they would label as G&T; approximately one or two students per class, some suggested, depending on their interpretation. The last one made a caveat that it depends on the definition and that s/he had had particularly motivated students. One stated that students who stand out by continuously thinking ‘openly’ are gifted. All commented
that they felt that it was inspiring and stimulating to teach them; some added that it could be frustrating, since they often did not get enough challenges in school. Several pointed out time restraints and one added that it can be intimidating:

*How will I have sufficient time to ‘see’ this student and give him/her enough challenges?*

A few also commented on the side effects of having G&T students in the class, stating that they boost the class as a whole. There was one remark that the school in question is the right element for them since it attracts many gifted students. Another statement tied in with the comment on the difficulty of separating giftedness and motivation:

*My view is that giftedness without hard work rarely leads to very much. I have seen students choose not to use their abilities.*

Only one teacher stated that s/he had received any information on how to support G&T students, whether during teacher training or after starting to work as a teacher. This is notable. All but one expressed a desire for professional development to aid G&T provision; many stressed that more time would be the main need. The risk of G&T students playing truant out of boredom resulting in lower grades was also mentioned. In addition to this, better facilities and technology were mentioned as factors that could improve the situation.

When it comes to establishing a policy, the views were mixed. Several were positive, one stating that ‘it’s high time top-end performers were given more resources’. Another suggested that since there is a policy for low achievers, why not have one for gifted students too; making a positive link to the expected increase in resources. Two reservations were expressed: it is not possible to launch one general policy and every individual is unique such that general information on the group would not be valuable. One respondent commented that

*if the G&T are less than one per mille of the cohort they could be placed in separate classes, but pulling out the 5-10 percent most gifted in every class would not be beneficial.*
This again points to the difficulty of identification and the importance of not routinely labelling x percent of a certain group as G&T.

5.3 Inger Wistedt, Professor of Education, Stockholm University

Inger Wistedt has been involved in G&T issues over many years. One of her projects relates to the teaching of mathematics to G&T students (3.3). I interviewed her to get an opinion ‘from the inside’ to compare with Headteachers and teachers.

There is still a widespread belief that ‘gifted children will always get by’.* Some of Wistedt’s students have interviewed various Headteachers over several years and often received responses like ‘maybe there are G&T students but it is up to the teachers to cater for them, there are no political demands to cater for them’*. All their energy was directed to low achievers. However, like the other respondents, Wistedt does feel that there has been a change in attitude recently. The first indication that attitudes were changing was when money was allocated to the first Swedish project on G&T in 2002 (3.3). This was a response to a 1994 European Council recommendation, she believes, rather than acting upon an independent wish to cater for this group:

When they saw that there was a European Council recommendation they realised that they’d have to do something.*

The increased co-operation within the EU was also mentioned and the importance of nurturing talents to be more competitive. The importance of changing attitudes across the whole education sector due to the many myths surrounding G&T was also stressed. Many Headteachers and teachers are unaware of the difficulties facing G&T students, regardless of their possible interest in the group. Mathematics being the focus of Wistedt’s study, she also specifically mentioned people’s general misunderstanding of the subject:

Mathematics is seen as easy to help G&T students in because you can just suggest that they keep counting. But that may easily bore them; mathematics is not just about counting. People do not know what mathematics is about if you just count. I spend a
References were also made to discussions with Johanna Raffan, Founder Director of the National Association for Able Children in Education (UK). Raffan had stressed that local support is necessary to change attitudes as well as a national policy. In spite of the developments of the last few years, Wistedt commented that the current status of G&T in Sweden cannot be compared with that of UK.

5.4 Christina Månberg, Director of Education, Swedish National Agency for Education

Christina Månberg has functioned as project leader at the Swedish National Agency for Education for the new focus classes, the best example of how Sweden caters for G&T. Since they are a very new initiative it is not yet possible to review them. Månberg stresses that it is a trial that will be evaluated (first time in October 2010) before a decision is made on permanency. In September 2010 ten more classes will also start. The departmental guidance states that there should be ten classes in total within mathematics and natural sciences and ten within social sciences and the arts. Students are recruited nationally and tests and interviews may be used to complement grades. This is different from all other upper secondary school programmes: it is not permitted to use tests for any other type of education (another exception being sports classes and aesthetic programmes). Månberg touches upon the importance of focusing on giftedness and interest; students admitted should have both for the respective subject area.

Månberg echoes Wistedt’s views upon the influence from the European Council/EU and increased internationalisation to explain the increased prominence of G&T. When asked if there are any other measures indicating the increased interest in G&T, Månberg states that

there have always been gifted students within sports and performing arts [referring to measures taken for these students] and this initiative is a consequence of a widening of the concept of giftedness. There has not been any tradition in Sweden for catering for G&T within academic subjects, this is what it has been like here for a long time.*
Månberg acknowledges that there are attitudes towards G&T that may need to be changed but contends that this is a political question. She is looking forward to following the development of this measure and stresses that the actual work is carried out by the schools, where the real knowledge is.

When asked whether a national policy would be useful, Månberg says that it is difficult to respond to and refers to the curriculum (‘education shall be adapted to each pupil’s preconditions and needs’) and to the political leadership.

5.5 Bertil Östberg, State Secretary, Department of Education, Sweden

Bertil Östberg is State Secretary at the Department of Education, politically appointed by the Minister of Education, Jan Björklund. Sweden has problems supporting G&T and low achievers: compared to Finland, we have more very low achievers and fewer exceptionally gifted children. Both ends must improve and Östberg clearly emphasises the importance of G&T education. The current government has conveyed a picture that it is important for G&T students not only to

be given more tasks of the same type, the importance is that they are given tasks that are more difficult to support their development.*

Since it is possible to go through school and ‘not do much’, some students struggle for want of study skills at university (as confirmed by Wahlström 1995:41; Reis 2009:319).

Östberg thinks Björklund’s view has lead to a change in attitude in Sweden, but also emphasises recent research. Contrary to the other respondents, he does not think that the increased internationalisation has had a lot of impact:

That depends on what you mean by it, I suppose, but educational issues are national, teachers rarely go to other countries and only three percent of teachers study in other countries during their education, so I believe this issue is national. There has been a debate on G&T in Denmark, but this did not have a lot of bearing in Sweden.*
The most important factor when it comes to support for G&T are the teachers. Because of this, the current government has given emphasis to teacher competence: not all teachers are qualified and have sufficient subject knowledge. A new teacher education is underway and teachers will soon be registered (like nurses e.g.). These measures aim to e.g. create better opportunities to support G&T students. Östberg quoted research indicating that G&T students at upper secondary school need knowledgeable teachers: if the teachers are considered to be average, it is hard for them to act as good examples. However, he added that research also shows that low achieving boys taught by gifted, female teachers do not achieve as much as they could have.

A new grade system will give G&T students more to strive for; the new top grade is ‘higher’ than the current highest one. The focus classes are also a general signal that

\[
it \text{it is ok to be gifted, not only in sports, music and dance, but also in mathematics, physics, social sciences or anything.}^* \]

No other concrete initiatives are in the pipeline, but a new law will make it possible to use selective tests already at age 13 and at age 10 if there are particular reasons. However, Östberg pointed out that one highly respected school focusing on music, Adolf Fredrik, has used entry requirements for a long time, although not legally permitted. He stresses that not all children should be obliged to take tests, but that it will create more opportunities that they are allowed.

Regarding young G&T children, Östberg returned to the importance of the teachers and contended that you cannot make laws about everything. The current government ‘focuses on knowledge’* and has given schools the right to submit written term reports early on to inform parents, but in the case of parents who do not take much notice, this is not a solution, but a separate problem. Working class G&T are disadvantaged; they do not keep up as well as children in higher socio-economic groups. A reference was made to research showing that the vocabularies of children in the two groups vary considerably: working class children only know half as many words when they start school and schools’ compensatory roles have diminished over the last decade. Östberg referred to the role of free schools: in some areas they have increased segregation, but in others they
have had a positive impact on opportunities for children in disadvantaged areas. In the suburb of Rinkeby, Stockholm, half of all children go to school in other areas.

The current government has not considered the possibility of establishing an outright policy. Östberg is not certain if it would be beneficial, but stresses that the needs of this group are emphasised and that current actions have led to change:

There are not that many who state that ‘gifted children always get by’ anymore. When my daughter went to school, a long time ago, she was told off for finishing off her maths book. I cannot believe that that would happen today.*

Mathematics has been the main focus, due to diminishing abilities in mathematics. Östberg referred to a study from 2003 showing that 14-year olds had the same abilities in mathematics as 13-year olds had had ten years earlier. The Swedish National Agency for Education has showed that there are systematic failures in the mathematics teaching. The higher GNP per capita a country has, the lower the interest in mathematics, natural sciences and technical subjects. Mathematics is our biggest problem and particular investments are needed.

Östberg feels that there were remarkably few reactions from teacher unions and other interest groups when the focus educations were presented. A large number of councils have applied to be allowed to start focus classes:

Socialist councils as well as middle and right-wing councils, everybody wants to be part of it and the political opposition has kept quiet.*

Although acceleration is a good initiative in theory, Östberg does not think that it necessarily works to start school one year early since it also has to do with aspects other than the intellectual one. Later acceleration does occur but is not common.

Östberg also detailed a recently commenced study into the possibility of a having a flexible school start, i.e. that children would start school in the autumn or spring term. This would also work against the ‘summer-born syndrome’, i.e. the effects of being the youngest in the class.18

---

18 In Sweden, this applies to children born in the last few months of each year, i.e. the youngest ones to start school in every class.
6.0 Findings: Sweden and England – a comparison of factors relating to G&T

This chapter looks into some factors, identified in the literature, which may have informed the statuses and attitudes towards G&T in Sweden and England.

6.1 Equality, equity and excellence

Equality, equity and excellence are important concepts within education but difficulties can arise when prioritising is necessary. Equality can be interpreted in different ways. All countries struggle with excellence and equity (Winstanley 2006:37): compared to other OECD countries, the United Kingdom is high in educational excellence but low in educational equality (Haight 2009:133). Equity refers to fairness and is easy to confuse with equality. Pyryt & Bosetti (2006) writes about the societal cycle of focus on equity and excellence; when excellence is in focus, support for G&T increases, however when equity is in focus the support decreases (p. 150). Winstanley (2006:22) writes that there is an ‘undeniable tension’ in the strive for excellence and equality – how should these be prioritised in limited budgets? Jencks (1988) lists different interpretations related to equality in education, some of which are:

- **democratic equality**: everyone should be given equal time and attention (same treatment to all)
- **moralistic justice**: virtue involves effort and those who make the most effort should be rewarded (based on intentions)
- **humane justice**: time and attention should be given based on the how much time and attention students have been given long term, possibly including compensating students for genetic disadvantages (what do we deserve)

Many different standpoints regarding G&T can be supported on the grounds on equality, including the view that G&T students should be given an equal amount of time by the teacher, regardless of differences in results. ‘Equality’ in general is an argument easy for everyone to support (Jencks 1988:533), but both England and Sweden have a history of conflicting views on G&T due to issues of equality, which in these traditions is largely associated with the humane justice interpretation. Jencks (1988) writes that
If Johnny is a worse reader than Mary, Johnny must have had fewer advantages than Mary. Johnny’s disadvantages may have been genetic, social, or educational, but whatever their origin strong humane justice demands that [the teacher] compensate Johnny by giving him extra attention (p. 522).

However, even if there were general agreement that teachers should spend more time with weak students than with strong students, the question of how much more remains (Jencks 1988:527). In Sweden, equality has included a view that school should compensate for inherited factors. In the 1950s-60s, equality meant making it possible for everyone to access education, but the interpretation changed to mean equal respect for different studies, equal names for different courses and equal value of courses to access higher education (Enkvist 2002:139). The most gifted had previously received most education; but it could be argued that the least gifted should receive most education to compensate (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000:88); a major difficulty being that not all people make use of opportunities to education to be a burden, making implementation politically impossible (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000:88). It may also be impossible to compensate for differences even over time since school is only one part of society and other factors also impact (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000:119). The fact that there is a perceived equality, however, is necessary for the general acceptance of an unequal division of benefits: there are always positions that cannot be shared (e.g. the post as Prime Minister), which is accepted based on this (Åberg 1992:3). Thus, education will remain differentiated and unequal – the main question is when and how to differentiate (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000:88).

Although officially in support of equality, there is scepticism in both countries about the importance of ensuring that all students, including G&T students, are accommodated in school. In Sweden this scepticism has continually been backed by government. It was long a non-issue since G&T students were believed and expected to get on regardless. It has also been as a moral issue – nobody should believe they are better than anyone else – whereas in England it was often considered that they were catered anyway for since there were selective schools.

These two perspectives tie in with observations made by Feather (1989): he stated that ‘in countries where individualistic achievement is favoured, rewards are directed
at able high achievers’; i.e. England, by giving them separate opportunities; and by Feather and McKee (1993) on collectivist cultures: ‘people showed a tendency to want to see high achievers fail’ (both as quoted by Winstanley 2006:25) i.e. Sweden, where many people e.g. are happy to see previously successful businesspeople fail: a governmental report (2009) notes that entrepreneurs are much needed and that they should not have to experience negativity arising from others’ envy (Globaliseringsrådet 2009; see also Winstanley 2004:49).

There are flaws with both angles. The Swedish argument fails since numerous studies show that not all able children manage on their own: there are an increasing number of studies on G&T underachievers, the reasons why they underachieve and how to support them (see e.g. Callard-Szulgit 2003, Winstanley 2004 and Chaffey 2009). These point out the high levels of underachievement amongst G&T children, who often remain unnoticed (Gross 2004:168-9).

The English argument fails since a negligible percentage of G&T students attend selective schools. The separate systems in England made it difficult for an individual to take advantage of the best provision (Rudnitski 2000:728 as quoted by Winstanley 2004:51). Since giftedness may not show or develop early in a person’s life, any time selective tests are carried out, they will fail to identify certain G&T students; it is impossible to predict exactly which children will eventually be categorised as G&T (see e.g. Eyre 1999:v, Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000:87; Wahlström 1995:27); although it seems that mathematical and musical abilities show early (Goodhew 2009:9).

Equality is not as straightforward a concept as it may sound. An important point is that fairness does not relate to everyone getting the same thing, but to meeting specific needs of each child (Porter 2005:211).

6.2 Political leadership

In England, after a period of 18 years of conservative leadership, a committee was established to look into G&T once Labour got into power in 1997. In Sweden, the Social Democratic party has dominated or constituted government since the 1940s (with the exception of six years in the late 1970s-early 1980s, and three years in the early 90s). During this time, no measures were taken, although the 1991-1994 middle-right wing government established the free school policy. Since the current middle-right wing government came
into power in 2006, several initiatives have been initiated or researched.\textsuperscript{19} It is not possible to draw any conclusions on the significance of political colour for the emphasis on G&T education. I believe that there are reasons to see it as a right wing issue if one stresses the responsibility of the individual for one’s life, as well as a left wing issue, if the importance of ensuring that children from across society get opportunities is emphasised.

\textbf{6.3 The consequences of choice}

British parents have long had options when it comes to choosing a school for their children. In England, the small remaining cohort of grammar schools are oversubscribed, with educated parents spending time, energy and money having their children practise the entry tests. G&T children of disadvantaged groups lose out: educated parents support their children at home (whether G&T or not), whereas G&T children from disadvantaged groups are less likely to have parents with resources and knowledge to foster them (Goodhew 2009:8) and thus mainly get support at school.

The ‘free school’ system in Sweden has led to an out flux of students from council run schools; creating a system not dissimilar to the British one. Unlike British independent schools, all Swedish schools are obliged to follow the national curriculum, but most free schools argue that their education is different in some way.\textsuperscript{20} Opponents argue that this system means that a larger number of students from privileged backgrounds than others attend ‘free schools’, since more educated parents make active choices: the default position is to go to the local council run school. However, since they are not allowed to cream off the best applicants at the allocation stage, this is not seen as a concrete way of accommodating G&T students, although some free schools may in practice have higher ability cohorts than the average council run school.

It is a matter of equality to ensure that all children are given equal chances to develop. In England, with its many different schools, it has long been difficult to compare schools. The decentralisation of the education system and the establishment of ‘free schools’ in Sweden may make it more difficult to ensure equality across the board (Linden-

\textsuperscript{19}Although the first ever research project on G&T in Sweden was initiated in 2002 under a Social Democratic government, Wistedt stated that it was likely allocated money more because the government ‘had to’ rather than coming from a genuine interest in the issue.

\textsuperscript{20} Checking the web pages of all free schools in Malmö, all schools stressed and explained – directly or indirectly – how they are different from council run schools.
sjö & Lundgren 2000:93). If council run school do not live up to parental expectations, parents who are sufficiently knowledgeable to make an active choice will increasingly move their children to schools that consider their needs, leading to a divided school system (Winner 1996:214), similar to the one in England. Because there are more G&T children in these groups it may have consequences for the intakes. A press release from the Swedish National Agency for Education (2009b) indicates that this is already underway; albeit not solely based on G&T: in some areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, many Swedish parents do not send their children to the local school due to the large proportion of immigrant children, who are supposedly not as successful academically, e.g. due to language barriers, but also due to other issues that impact on the teaching and learning.

League tables have long been an important feature of school choice in England, but they are only just starting to make an impact in Sweden. G&T students may stand a risk of being ‘used’ by the schools to profile themselves as good. I have anecdotal evidence that English schools demand their students to spend more time than is beneficial on homework to try to position themselves in the league tables (also confirmed by Clark & Callow 1998:60).

The solution is not to reduce parental choice: an education system can never completely even out the differences created by family circumstances (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000:119). Equality does not imply that all schools should be exactly alike, but that all should make use of their conditions in the best way to create a school with equal opportunities (Englund & Quennerstedt 2008:39). In Sweden, if G&T children are not supported to find a school that will challenge them (whether council run or free school), or in England if they miss out on going to grammar school and their parents do not have the means to send them to an independent school they are less likely to develop fully. Because of this, it is as important in Sweden as in England that all schools cater for G&T.

6.4 The role of single-sex education

Another interesting difference is the attitude towards single-sex schools. In England, there are still many: 2 percent of non-private schools, but 22 percent of the private ones (DCSF: Edubase). During the nineteenth century it was argued in Sweden that boys and girls should be educated separately to avoid young women behaving improperly (Steenberg 1997:85). Private girls’ schools were established to offer girls a quality education. The emphasis was
not on girls’ better chances of achieving in girls’ schools; and all girls’ schools were closed when the comprehensive school was established, in line with the view that everyone should attend the same school (Florin 2009). In England, some argue that girls’ schools offer girls a better chance of excelling in subjects where boys have historically dominated, e.g. maths. However, no reliable evidence has been found to indicate that boys are inherently better at maths: many studies have been carried out, with varying results (see review in Hong & Milgram 2008:85).

It is thus not possible to say whether the existence of girls’ schools in England or the lack of them in Sweden contribute to G&T girls’ (or boys’) development opportunities. Because of the difference in societal views on gender roles it is unlikely that England will give up on its single-sex schools and unthinkable that single-sex schools will become permitted in Sweden. However, given the contradictory research on outcomes the existence or lack of single-sex schools is unlikely to be a major contributor to the development of support for G&T students.

6.5 Social effects of being gifted and talented

An abundance of research looks at the social and emotional difficulties a G&T child may encounter (see e.g. Gross 2004, O’Reilly 2006, Freeman 2009, Leroux 2009), such as not fitting in socially in a class (6.5.1); girls (especially) not wishing anyone to understand that they are gifted and G&T boys being more emotional than the average boy and suffering the consequences of that (6.5.2). Apart from detailing these, I also present some research about the consequences of these social difficulties and measures taken (6.5.3).

6.5.1 Bullying

Bullying due to giftedness is a common feature that many gifted children are likely to experience. Hollingworth (1942) pointed out the difficulties for a G&T child to find friends in a heterogeneous class where there are no intellectual peers (as quoted by Gross 2004:17); for a G&T child it may be an insurmountable task (Porter 2005:85). The social relationships with peers get more difficult depending on a child’s relative giftedness, compared to the rest of the class (Pyryt & Bosetti 2006:148). Gifted students are emotionally and socially normally closer to their ‘ability'-age than their chronological age (Gross 2006:125), making it difficult to find true peers. The issue of ‘mixing with different people’ is also relevant. It
is often said that G&T students must learn to work with a range of pupils (Gross 2006:128). However, most adults mainly mix with people within their homogeneous groups (ibid). Nobody would argue that G&T students should only work with true peers, but it is not reasonable to expect them never to do so.

Gross (2004) noted differences in interests: many G&T children like games that involve intellectual skill, which may make it more difficult for them to find friends; a result being that some have to choose between developing their interests and having friends (p. 132, 199; see also Wahlström 1995:90). In Gross’ long-term study, many G&T children underachieved for peer acceptance throughout their school years (Gross 2004:272). G&T children have high standards of morality, can be overly judgmental towards people who do not live up to them, and have a low tolerance of hypocrisy (Gross 2004:195). Many look for older friends, however, this is not facilitated by school and G&T children may not be appreciated by older children of average ability due to their feelings of inferiority (op.cit. p. 134-5). On the other hand, children who are accelerated to another year group were reported to be confident in their relationships: they are placed in a group where their mental age corresponds with the other class mates (op.cit. p. 184).

For the few lucky gifted ones in England who are accepted at a selective school, this might reduce the risk of social problems. However, in some socio-economic groups (but not all) it is more accepted to be a high-achiever and being a ‘pushy parent’ is a given in many circles21. In Sweden, although many Headteacher and teachers wish to diminish the social aspect and claim that bullying someone due to his/her abilities would not take place in their school (see e.g. Melander 1995, Nylander 2009) I remain unconvinced. For historical reasons, the emphasis on equality has led to a strong emphasis on egalitarian provision and on the Swedish ideal to refuse to reward individuals who excel more than others (Persson, R.S., Joswig, H. & Balogh, L. 2000:718 as quoted by Winstanley 2004:48). Equally, the way in which (educated) English parents discuss their children’s exam results I have not experienced in Sweden.

---

21 It should be noted that this is a term only: many people believe that parents of G&T children ‘push’ them to succeed, and many parents report that they have been accused of this by teachers; however, in a long-term study by Gross (2004), 11 out of 12 children strongly refuted this (p. 182).
6.5.2 Gender issues

Gender makes more difference to G&T than to average learners and many studies have showed that gender is the strongest influence on G&T achievement (Freeman 2000). Many studies indicate that G&T girls are more vulnerable than boys: more girls than boys hide their potential to fit in with their peers (see e.g. Silverman 1989:209; Swiatek 1998 as quoted by Porter 2005:83), probably partly due to the fact that girls generally get less social support than boys regarding their giftedness (VanTassel-Baska, J., Olszewski-Kubilius, P. & Kulieke, M. 1994 as quoted by Porter 2005:85). VanTassel-Baska (1989) comments that gifted girls are particularly vulnerable to being made to live up to cultural expectations, which leads them to seeking peer acceptance rather than developing their abilities (p. 82). This means that girls are underachievers more often than boys (Hong & Milgram 2008:84). This could have been an argument for single sex schools, but I have found no unambiguous data to evidence this. Silverman (1989) states that G&T girls are sometimes neglected due to lower expectations (p. 209). Lee (2000, as quoted by Porter 2005) interviewed two teachers with 44 years’ experience between them who claimed never to have met a gifted girl (p. 166) and in most cultures twice as many boys as girls are identified as gifted by their parents (Freeman 2000; see also Persson 1997a:271).

Equally, many studies suggest that gifted boys are often more emotional than average boys, leading to difficulties since they do not demonstrate traditional male attributes (Caudill 2006:201; Porter 2005:71). Enkvist (2002) quotes Frykman, Professor of Ethnology, who comments on a change in masculinity: knowledge used to be boys’ best way of asserting themselves in school, but it is not anymore, which leads to a conflict (p. 149). G&T boys also suffer more from the ‘summer-born syndrome’ (Goodhew 2009:12). The comparatively lower results of the youngest children in each year group are well-known; less so that they persist even until the end of the mandatory education at age 15-16.

England is a more traditional and less equal society. Might that mean that emotional boys are worse off there than in Sweden, and is it more difficult for G&T girls in England than in Sweden to show their abilities? When it comes to cultural expectations, I do not think there are any major differences between England and Sweden in expectations on girls.
These factors call for a need for different policies, or emphases, and could be particularly important to raise the profile for girls’ education, that some cultures do not value (Goodhew 2009:119).\textsuperscript{22}

6.5.3 \textit{Consequences of social difficulties and measures taken}

There is no evidence for G&T students having a higher suicide rate (Gust-Brey & Cross 1999; Lajoie & Shore 1981 as quoted by Porter 2005:51) or frequency of depressions (Neihart 1999, 2000 as quoted by Porter 2005:51). Most studies have little evidence to suggest that G&T students are more prone to emotional difficulties (see e.g. Freeman 1991; Gallucci 1988, Rost & Czeschlik 1994; the latter two as quoted by Porter 2005:54), or that giftedness in itself is associated with emotional problems (Freeman 1998:27); but Persson (1997a) note that G&T girls are heavily overrepresented amongst girls suffering from anorexia (p. 271) and Winner (1996) writes that children with exceptionally high IQ tend to have social problems (p. 192).

In Sweden, little has been done to improve G&T students’ social situation. In England, local branches of the National Association for Gifted Children have long organised activities for children and their families. Although initiated and run by interested parties (normally parents), this is a good initiative and more would be needed in Sweden too\textsuperscript{23}. In a study on the effects of summer programmes on G&T adolescents, Rinn (2009) found that most of them benefit (p. 20-22) and concludes that if a child benefits, it is imperative that s/he is given opportunities to partake (\textit{op.cit.} p. 31). Other studies stress that the effect is often a lowered academic self-esteem but a raised social self esteem (Chan 1988; Gross 1997, 1998; all as quoted by Porter 2005:50). O’Reilly (2006) wrote that 60 percent of his respondents noted that the summer course had had a beneficial impact and that the social effect of the courses cannot be underestimated (p. 113). Rogers (1991) showed that grouping G&T students together prevented emotional isolation since they were at least sometimes in a group of people who are intellectually and socially the same (as quoted by O’Reilly 2006:114).

\textsuperscript{22} As a curiosity, in Thailand chemistry is seen as a female subject, due to its connection with cooking, and most chemists are women (Steenberg 1997:56). Cultural expectations on girls’ and boys’ have a definite impact on life choices.

\textsuperscript{23} I have anecdotal evidence of a few Swedish universities offering short summer courses for upper secondary G&T students, but have yet to find any thorough evidence of attempts to support younger students. However, I have not investigated this methodically.
The awareness of the impact of lacking a peer group means that actions can and should be taken to limit the risks of problems as far as possible. Since the acceptance towards giftedness and the ambitions to excel are less hidden and more outspoken in at least some societal groups in England, this signifies a difference between Sweden and England that may ease the situation for some English G&T students.

One important point is that a G&T student is still a child. There are many teachers who lack empathy for them based on their giftedness (Balchin 2009:52; see also Nylander 2009), which has nothing to do with their social situation. Webb, J.T., Meckstroth, E.A. & Tolan, S.S. (1991) wrote that ‘although gifted children possess exceptional capabilities, most cannot excel without assistance’ (as quoted by Porter 2005:111). All children, however, need adult support, friends and peer ship.

7.0 Discussion

In my discussion I will analyse the results, set a vision detailing some aspects and measures to consider and discuss how a policy could impact G&T support in Swedish schools.

7.1 Personal reflections

In Sweden and England, until the 1990s, few direct measures were taken to provide support for G&T education. Since then a lot has happened in England. There is a clear official policy that G&T is a natural part of education: although there are still differences between schools in the care of G&T, the fact that there is a national strategy has raised the profile. Checking the prospectuses and web pages of all secondary schools in a London borough, all mention what they do for G&T children. Individual teachers may or may not agree, but as long as schools have a duty to report on measures it will remain on the agenda, even if the conflict around equity and elitism is unlikely to disappear. This is a big step forward, although some educators maintain that other groups should be prioritised. All my respondents were supportive, but a 2006 survey showed that less than half of all teachers in the UK consider G&T students to require special attention (Hewston 2006 as quoted by Balchin 2009:52). The English policy is dependent on teachers to implement it (Campbell, Eyre, Muijs, Neelands & Robinson 2009a:180).
This is the current situation in England. Based on existing policies and initiatives, how do you convince all educators of the importance of G&T education? Some easy solutions can help: G&T training carried out for primary teachers in connection with the EiC programme showed that once they realised that ensuring that G&T are challenged will benefit all students, they became positive (Wilson 2009:235; see also Goodhew 2009:x; Reis 2009:323). In my view, though, it should not be necessary to state the benefits for other groups to argue the need for G&T children to be supported.

In Sweden, there is no clear G&T policy and research has shown that few Swedish educators have considered G&T worthy of attention. With the recent initiative of focus classes, and increased research, it is possible that the tide is turning. It is still questionable whether more than a minority of educators regard G&T as an ordinary part of education policy.

I was surprised to hear several English respondents remark on the lack of provision, since in my view they are much better catered for in England than in Sweden. Two commented on teachers not being confident enough to differentiate education, highlighting the importance of incorporating an awareness of needs at all levels of abilities within teacher training and professional development. One commented on it being unacceptable to ‘blow your own trumpet’ in England, making it difficult to give attention to academic achievers, as opposed to physical achievements (e.g. sports) that are regularly celebrated (as confirmed by Clark & Callow 1998:50). The same difficulties that I have met in Sweden are said to prevail. At least measures have been taken and are in place, and it was clear that my interviewees had considered the issue.

Most of my English respondents more or less agree on the baseline facts, which implies that the national policy has at least resulted in it being debated. Although the existing policy is not considered to be sufficiently successful, there is agreement that its existence has made it necessary for schools to consider G&T needs. There was previously no such need and schools could evade responsibility; just like the situation is in Sweden today, where this aspect is not monitored. This can result in no measures being taken or teachers dealing with it independently, which may mean little consistency, and/or insufficient outcomes. In neither case does the school live up to the national curriculum.
One result mentioned frequently is G&T children ending up assisting the teacher. Comments are often made that there is no better way to consolidate your own learning than to help other people; Alderborn (1997) comments on motivated students furthering his/her knowledge by sharing them (p. 46). There are problems with this view. It is based on an idea that G&T students are motivated achievers who will inspire others (Gross 2006:128). Porter (2005) writes about the risk of G&T children feeling valued only if they help others (p. 82). Hadenius (1990) quotes a then official’s comments about the change to comprehensive school in Sweden: the idea was that high achievers would influence low achievers; however, the result was the opposite (as quoted by Enkvist 2002:140). Letting G&T children assist the teacher can never be the only option for G&T children.

Most Headteachers had a more comprehensive view than the teachers. Headteachers have budgetary responsibilities and receive guidelines from national and local levels and it will be more natural for them to consider this next to other issues. They will also be more used to looking at educational issues from a top-down perspective. In addition, they had been questioned previously. The teachers, although understanding of the issue, were only asked to consider the needs of G&T and did not have to think about consequences for other areas; although some linked it to resource allocation. Some Swedish educators showed little understanding or, although acknowledging the fact that G&T have needs, put them behind the needs of low-achievers. There is no need to compare G&T needs with other needs. Nobody would rank the needs of hearing impaired children with those of children with dyslexia: all three needs are needs in their own right. Some Headteachers still argued that there is no reason to label children. It is important that labelling children does not result in them feeling limited by the label and also that the G&T label is not seen as static with the associated risks of that (1.2.2); hence, regular reassessment is needed. However, a formal label could release funding and increase the available support. Gross (2004) makes a comparison with special education where labelling helps by indicating to what extent a child differs, making it easier for educators to choose techniques to help them (p. 5). School children are labelled every day anyway (Porter 2005:209); all teachers assess their students’ needs, and the only ones that are not necessarily assessed are G&T children: since they may have reached the ceiling there are no scales to measure them against and it is therefore easy to leave them out. This is detrimental to their education.
On a higher level, the political leadership in Sweden has a clear understanding for G&T issues, as has the Swedish National Agency for Education. The State Secretary did confirm that support for G&T needs are important and most Swedish respondents stressed the importance of the increased internationalisation, leading to more competition and consequently an added emphasis on excellent resources, one of which can be skilled manpower. The fact that the European Council stressed already in 1994 that G&T needs should be catered for – stating this as a right in line with the fundamental human right to education – furthermore increases the status of G&T education.

These comments constitute a striking difference from the mid-90s. The official view is now that it is natural that all children, irrespective of abilities, should be challenged and that their education should be adapted according to their needs. In addition, all respondents agree that the attitude towards G&T has changed. Whether or not this is sufficient is questionable, but it is an excellent start to developing more measures.

My belief, confirmed by my English respondents, is that the measures taken since 1997 were partly established because of the support from the national leadership on education, as demonstrated by the policy. It has led to an increase in measures and strengthened the acceptance of G&T as a part of education policy. In an ideal world, there would not be any need for policies in Sweden considering the wording in the national curriculum, however, in reality G&T children are at risk of being disadvantaged in school, and due to this a policy could be beneficial.

7.2 My vision

It is a problem that some educators neglect the needs of G&T children. Already in the 1940s Hollingworth argued that G&T students are not studied because they do not disrupt classes (Gross 2004:17); instead the school focuses on those who give it trouble (Hollingworth 1931 as quoted by Gross 2004:17). Whether support is given for the sake of individual G&T children or to improve Sweden’s competitiveness, as noted by different respondents, is less relevant: the main thing is that something is done to ensure that this group is not neglected, almost by default. Treffinger (2009) commented that G&T is an oxymoron: there is a need for gifted adults in society but the need for G&T education is not

---

24 It has been shown that G&T children nowadays are less likely to oblige.
acknowledged (p. 111). Nevertheless, it is important to state that I in no way wish to see resources for children with other special needs diminish: all children should receive the support they need.

Although there is a societal wish that all children are educated to an agreed baseline, not all children are receptive to being educated. The increased interest in G&T issues may increase the divide when it comes to allocation of funding: is it more important to increase the opportunities for the highly able or to raise the baseline? My response echoes an English respondent: by also allocating resources to G&T we raise the baseline for all. Research indicates that by taking measures for G&T children, everyone’s standards increase and not only the highly able benefit (Goodhew 2009:x). If this were conveyed clearly I believe a common understanding could be created (just like for the primary teachers in 7.1). Feldhusen (2003) stated that an ideal G&T programme would touch almost everyone in a school since it would focus on helping youth develop their talents (p. 45).

The social situation of G&T children is a difficult issue. However, many studies have shown that this can be counterbalanced by G&T children meeting intellectual peers regularly, e.g. on summer courses. Using IT to individualise education would also be a useful way forward: the use of IT in schools supports individualised learning since pupils can work independently, at their own pace and linked to their own needs (Myndigheten för skolutveckling 2007 [National authority for school development]; see also Wallace 2009:99). G&T children could work on side projects with children from other parts of the country, without creating any extra work for the class teacher. Pyryt & Bosetti (2006) write that IT could reduce a G&T child’s isolation if s/he has no peers in the home community (p. 149). However, only 25 percent of teachers of 6-15 year olds and 75 percent of upper secondary teachers have access to their own computer and there are six students per computer (Swedish National Agency for Education 2007 as quoted by Skolporten 2009). As long as teachers do not have access to their own laptop they will not use it in class (Näslund 2009).

One widely researched issue relates to whether low achievers benefit from having G&T children in their classroom. I have read research stating that they do (The Swedish National Agency for education 2009c) as well as research stating that these objections, often given by teachers, are not supported by research: children of low and
average ability enjoyed having the G&T withdrawn since they then had a chance to stand out; and that low achievers model on average achievers rather than top achievers (Kennedy 1989, 1994 as quoted by Gross 2006:128). Suknandan & Lee (1999) concluded that ability grouping had no influence on performance, but could have a negative effect on the attitudes and motivation of students in lower sets (as quoted by Smith 2006:6). It is partly irrelevant where G&T students achieve more: research on G&T children’s social situation is unanimous that it is pivotal that they get to spend time in genuine peer groups.

An easy way of catering for G&T children would be to ensure that skipping a school year (‘acceleration’) becomes an established alternative. Freeman (2001) quotes traditional difficulties for accelerated students: lack of social, emotional or physical maturity (as quoted by Goodhew 2009:41). Gross, however, states that academic acceleration is one of few measures for G&T that have been comprehensively and rigorously studied, referring to a meta-analysis of 26 controlled studies, all of which indicated positive results (Colangelo & Assouline 2009:196-7; Kulik & Kulik 1984 as quoted by Gross 2004:145). Acceleration is a comparatively easy to manage, cheap solution to some G&T needs and should be looked into.

In Sweden, most resources for G&T are allocated mathematics. Several Headteachers as well as Månberg, Östberg and Wistedt cited the relative importance of increasing the interest in mathematics since Swedish students’ abilities have decreased sharply. It is thus fairly logical that the first research project on G&T focused on mathematics. There is also a general bias towards mathematics: Eyre’s (2009) four volume band on G&T consists of 114 chapters. Five deal with G&T in specific subjects; all in mathematics. It is therefore positive that the focus classes are earmarked from the outset to be within different subjects. I would like some initiatives for languages, the importance of which is growing. An interesting note is that teachers identify more students as G&T in sciences and languages than in any other subject, which indicates that they are more used to thinking about G&T in these subjects (Persson 1997b:28) – this goes against the current funding allocation, but confirms that there is a need for measures in other areas too.

25 Shortly after this essay was handed in the subjects of the ten focus classes starting in 2010 were announced, three of which will be languages.
What age range to cater for is important. All Swedish initiatives I know of have been for upper secondary students. The importance of supporting G&T children early has been stated, particularly for children from lower socio-economic groups. Children from higher socio-economic groups often get some support in their home, but children from lower groups are more unlikely to be encouraged to achieve. Children of privileged backgrounds are advantaged since they will be familiar with school attitudes and more used to analytical thinking (see e.g. Winstanley 2006:22-23, Jacobsen & Wilder; Sternberg & Arroyo 2006:113; Jencks 1988:527). Gifted three year olds from working class families will be behind their middle-class peers by the age of five, the divide increasing as they grow older (Goodhew 2009:7). However, even if identified as G&T, there may be problems: Reay (2004) comments on a specific G&T programme that the working class children left; nearly all within the first term, stating that they felt awkward and out of place (as quoted by Eyre 2009:13). These are matters of equality that all educators should be keen to rectify and one key is to have an early support mechanism.

The State Secretary stressed the importance of teachers and having a good teacher education to support G&T students. Goodhew (2009) refers to G&T adults often having emphasised the importance of inspirational teachers for their success (Goodhew 2009:24) and this is confirmed by Pyryt & Bosetti (2006):

The most important barrier to effective accommodation of gifted students in regular classrooms is the inability of the typical teacher to effectively differentiate (p. 150; see also Vialle & Quigley 2009:279).

Over many years, the interest in becoming a teacher has shrunk. Recent research has shown that a decreasing number of teacher students are from the higher percentiles of various abilities (Grönqvist & Vlachos 2008:1).26 In a survey on career choices, many students of medicine (40%) and law (32%) said that they had considered becoming teachers but the low pay and difficult conditions put them off (National Union of Teachers in Sweden 2008). Östberg also stated the risk of teachers’ knowledge not being enough to challenge a G&T student, leading to a decrease in respect for the teacher and a substandard education

26 Grönqvist &Vlachos do not state that this group would be the best teachers, but a balanced intake is favourable to match the most appropriate teachers with different student groups.
for the student. A new teacher education will be implemented in 2011 which may lead to a changing trend when it comes to the popularity of the profession. Persson (1997b) stated that no Swedish teacher students receive any information on G&T (p. 24)\(^ {27} \), whereas my impression is that (some) other special needs are always studied as a matter of course. Ideally, teacher education should include an element on G&T. Shore & Kaizer (2009) refer to a panel of 21 experts in G&T education which stated that appropriate training of teachers is the most important aspect of catering for gifted children (p. 314). All teacher respondents also commented on needing more information, and Campbell et al (2009a:181) stress the importance of teacher education including some G&T elements. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that there is not one way of teaching G&T students: like all students, they are different (Eyre 2006:165).

### 7.3 A new policy?

Governments have different instruments to influence policies; voluntary and compulsory (Hill 2005:141). In this case, all respondents considered the need to have a national, i.e. compulsory, policy; one respondent referring to ‘trouble’ that would emerge otherwise. A governmental decision to outline the most appropriate policy should be based on availability, best practice and the current measures (\textit{ibid}). The overarching aim should be to create a policy that maximises the decision maker’s values after an analysis of all available alternatives (\textit{op. cit.} p. 146). The decision maker’s intention is already set in the national curriculum. This would not need to change, but since the policy has rarely been used for G&T purposes, it might be beneficial to stress that it should include all needs, including G&T needs. Although Sweden has ‘lost its legal support’ for allowing neglect of G&T, this requirement is not yet firmly established.

Winner (1996) wrote that it is more likely that a policy about G&T would be based on political values rather than on actual research (p. 218). This was long the case and was one reason why it was ‘impossible’ to take any real measures for G&T children: many saw them as advantaged and not in need of any support. Although still the case in some places, several countries have established genuine G&T policies; Spain, Scotland and New Zealand being three examples with clear cut policies (European Agency for Development

---

\(^ {27} \) I have anecdotal evidence that the teacher education at Persson’s own university now includes a very small element on G&T.
in Special Needs Education: Country information, Spain; Winstanley 2006:28; Ministry of Education, New Zealand: National Administration Guidelines). There is also national level legislation in Brazil, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan (Clark 2006:291). In England, the Education Act states that English as an additional language, giftedness and high ability are not included within the definition of special educational needs; however, in 2005 government stated its ambition that all children, including G&T, should have the right support to reach the limits of their capabilities (DCSF: Principles and Aims). There is evidence of many countries adopting policies, or adapting existing policies to include G&T students. For the European countries, this may be a result of the European Council resolution.

It is difficult to decide which priority to assign policies (Winship 2006:109). In the case of Sweden, the difficulty of addressing G&T may be exacerbated by our egalitarian tradition. Generally, there are also cases when policies are not established because of sudden world events or because they might benefit unpopular minority groups (Hill 2005:162). Although difficult to label as an unpopular minority group, a policy benefiting G&T children might not increase a Swedish politician’s popularity. Most decisions are made outside parliament (Santesson-Wilson 2003:92) though, which means that there are opportunities for interest and pressure groups. Some policies may be accepted depending on who supports them (Wilson 2006:152; see also Santesson-Wilson 2003:89); many policies have changed in the last minute since the decision-maker has been swayed by a lobbying group. Few people realise how severe the social effects can be for G&T children. There is no strong force supporting G&T in Sweden, whether research or parent based. In England, interest groups have pushed this issue over many years.

Good timing is important for new policies, and it is more difficult for policies that lead to higher taxes to gain approval (Goodin et al 2006:156). My view is that it has never been more right than now: other countries have policies, there is an official duty and education is a hot topic, likely to get increasing attention over the next year with the election in 2010. It is possible that it would become even easier somewhat later, but it would be difficult for educators and unions to retreat from their current approval.

Traditional policy analysis discusses the best means to obtain a specified end (Winship 2006:110) but does not state how to deal with conflicting ends. There may be a
conflict between the general public’s view that G&T are advantaged and individual G&T students’ feelings that they are neglected and the consequences of that, as detailed. Municio (1995) asks if society can change through political decisions and refers to the strong Swedish belief in national decrees (p. 9). Given the English views on the English policy, and the funding allocated to the first G&T project in Sweden, I think that it is possible to change society through decisions. As shown in the Headteacher interviews though, there is an overload of top-down decisions that must be examined: would a framework for G&T support be enough, where individual councils/schools make decisions about implementation, or is a detailed policy needed? The importance of giving schools freedom to shape curricula was stressed by three respondents (Tranås council, Karlstad University and Umeå University) consulted on new school curricula (Governmental bill [Prop.] 2008/09:87 p. 12). Persuasive arguments are important for policy-makers to ensure that education policies are implemented (Goodin et al 2006:5); here the reason for supporting G&T education. Establishing a policy is not the end. The ensuing discussion with educators to implement the policy is even more important to ensure change.

7.4 Conclusion

This study has shown that there is not yet general awareness of the issues surrounding G&T education in Sweden. This is in spite of the recommendation from the European Council regarding education for gifted children in 1994 and in spite of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child:

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (Article 29).

This has not applied to G&T students, since them seemingly ‘get by anyway’. Yet with that reasoning, it is difficult to argue that everyone should attend school for the same number of years. Nobody argues that G&T children should have a better education, just a developmentally appropriate one (Porter 2005:218).

It is important that more measures are taken to improve the management of G&T students. O’Reilly (2006) writes that the more acceptable it becomes to organise
things for G&T students, the less stigma is attached to participating and the more we can recognise the important role that they have within the education system (p. 114). To allow public figures to stand uncorrected regarding implications of not providing for G&T students is to perpetuate incorrect myths of such students not having difficulties or needing support. This is not the case, as has been shown. I therefore call for a revision of policy regarding G&T that will inform teachers, educators and society as a whole; including an element in teacher training which considers the needs of G&T students and the aims of G&T education.
List of references


DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). Edubase: register of all educational establishments in England and Wales, maintained by the Department for Children, Schools and Families Standards Site: www.edubase.gov.uk (26 October 2009)

DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). (No date) *Who is gifted and talented?* Standards Site: http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/giftedandtalented/who (26 October 2009)


Santesson-Wilson, Peter (2003). Studier i symbolpolitik. Lund University, Lund Political Studies 129. Lund: Department of Political Science


Appendix 1: Interviews with English respondents

1. What is your view on G&T education and G&T students?
2. [If applicable] Why are G&T needs important to consider?
3. How did the 1997 House of Commons report change conditions for G&T students, if applicable?
4. Is the current provision suitable?
5. Is a national policy a good way of ensuring that G&T students are supported?

Appendix 2: Interviews with Swedish Headteachers

1. Vad gör NN nu?
2. Kommer du ihåg hur du såg på duktiga elever när vi träffades senast?
3. Har du uppfattningen att du har ändrat din syn på dem sedan dess?
4. Vad anser de idag om duktiga elever?
5. Vad kan man göra för att stötta dem? (ev., om de fortfarande arbetar som rektorer/med utbildning)
6. Vad tycker de om de nya ”elitklasserna” som har börjat i gymnasieskolor runtom i landet?
7. Skulle en nationell policy göra det enklare/mer naturligt att hjälpa även duktiga elever? Hur bör den utformas?
Appendix 3: Questionnaire

“Duktiga” (särbegåvade) elever

Jag skriver för närvarande ett examensarbete inom lärarutbildningen som handlar om duktiga elever ("särbegåvade" elever). Ett duktigt/särbegåvat barn definieras i denna enkät som ett barn som kontinuerligt förvånar dig genom sin mycket stora förmåga i ett (eller flera) skolämne/n. För att få en bild av olika lärares erfarenhet och tankar om denna grupp elever har jag framställt denna enkät som jag vore väldigt tacksam för att få hjälp från dig med. Alla svar är anonyma.

Om du har frågor innan du vill besvara enkäten, vänligen kontakta mig på melanderasa@hotmail.com eller [telefonnummer borttaget vid publicering]; alternativt min handledare vid Malmö högskola Marie Leijon, universitetsadjunkt, marie.leijon@mah.se eller 040 665 81 87.

1. Hur länge har du arbetat som lärare?

2. Har du någon gång undervisat eller i din klass haft någon eller några elever som du uppfattat som särskilt begåvade? Om ja, i vilken utsträckning?

Hur upplevde du det – reflektioner?

3. Har du vid något tillfälle under din tid som lärare fått riktad information om duktiga/särbegåvade elever och/eller deras behov? Om ja, i vilket sammanhang?

4. Vilken information/vilka kunskaper behöver du som lärare för att bäst stödja duktiga/särbegåvade elever?

5. Skulle en uttalad nationell policy angående denna grupp elever och deras behov vara positiv/negativ? Varför/på vilket sätt?

Om du har andra tankar/synpunkter om denna grupp som du vill vidarebefordra till mig får du gärna använda baksidan.

Tusen tack för hjälpen!

Med vänlig hälsning
Åsa Melander