Independent Educational Project

The Cinderella of Education

Gifted and Talented pupils, with a focus on Double Exceptionality

Author: Nicola Claire Friel
Supervisor: Marina Wernholm
Examiner: Elisabeth Elmeroth
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Linnaeus University  
Department of Education  

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Author: Nicola Claire Friel  
Tutor: Marina Wernholm  

Abstract  
The teaching of the gifted has been a core part of education itself since it was first formalised, however despite these years of experience the academic community are no closer to understanding or recommending best practice to the thousands of teachers who deal with the challenges associated with gifted and talented education on a daily basis. This study hopes to understand teachers attitudes towards these types of children as well as those children who fall into the doubly exceptional category through qualitative semi structured interviews and focus groups. The results showed that while participants held positives attitudes to both types of students under study they were largely unsure as to effectively educate these children and felt that proper government and global guidelines as well as teacher training could overcome these issues.  

Keywords  
Gifted and Talented, Double Exceptionality, Teachers Attitudes, IQ, Inclusion, Interpertivest Paradigm, Qualatative.  

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1 Introduction

Education can be viewed as the most universal goal of any society, and has been described by Nelson Mandela as, “the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” The area of Gifted and Talented education has been at the forefront of education in recent years and has divided many global opinions as to its definition and approach. The core value of education is that regardless of aptitude all children should be enabled to reach their full potential in their learning. This belief is mirrored through the 1989 U.N convention on the rights of the child. In Articles 28 & 29 it states that all children have the right to a primary education and the education provided should develop each child’s talents and abilities whilst encouraging a respect for everyone. This highlights the need for gifted and talented education in schools worldwide. The researchers interest in this area has derived from forming a close relationship with a gifted but doubly exceptional child, and one which they hope to investigate further through this piece of research.

1.1: The Swedish Education System

The Swedish education system is based on democracy where every child’s voice is important and deserves to be heard and therefore education for the gifted and talented should be an area of central importance within the Swedish curriculum (Elkholm and Modigh, 2011). The curriculum states that the school system should promote the
‘development and learning of all pupils and feed the lifelong desire to learn whilst also encouraging pupils to discover their own uniqueness and individuality by adapting teaching to suit the individual circumstances and needs’. This focus on the development of the individual shows that within Sweden the needs of gifted and talented children should be met as teachers are required to provide work at the level of the child regardless if this work is significantly above the level of the rest of the class. In addition Berhanu (2011) cites (LPO94, p. 6) that in Sweden, “consideration should be taken of the different abilities and needs of the students. There are different ways to reach the goal. . . . Hence teaching cannot be designed in the same way for everyone.”

1.2: Statutory Provision for Gifted and Talented Education in Sweden

Historically and currently in Sweden there are no statutory provisions in place to effectively educate gifted children. The largely egalitarian school system has focused on attaining the benchmark rather than surpassing it. The curriculum states that ‘The school has a special responsibility for those pupils who for different reasons experience difficulties in attaining the goals that have been set up for the education’ (LGR11, 2011). This then begs the question as to why only those students who fail to meet the set goals should be given special consideration by the school and not those who exceed these goals. In 2009 Sweden took its first steps towards a state sanctioned gifted and talented education program by launching a five year pilot study at upper secondary school level which arranged twenty programs focusing on areas such as mathematics,
natural and social sciences and the humanities for those deemed to show potential in their chosen field. (Sriraman and Kyeong, 2011). However this initiative only benefitted a select few who geographically were lucky enough to participate. Without nationwide schemes gifted and talented pupils will continue to slip through the cracks and fail to reach the unknown level of their gift.

1.3: Teacher Training in Gifted and Talented Education

As of 2011, special pedagogy must be included in all teacher training programs within Sweden; however this does not explicitly mention gifted and talented education. This is despite a government report stating that ‘Even gifted students may need to be the subject of special pedagogical efforts’ (Swedish Government Official Report, 2008, pg.209, cited in Sriraman and Kyeong, 2011). Only two teacher training programs specifically offer courses in gifted education, these being Stockholm University and Linnaeus University (Sriraman and Kyeong, 2011). The latter, offers the internationally recognised ECHA course with produces a specialist gifted teacher within a specific subject, in this case mathematics. The idea being that those who complete the course will become regional leaders of gifted education rather than general teachers; however this initiative has yet to become successful as it has not become part of the general education system. Due to the lack of wide spread training however for the foreseeable future most gifted students in Sweden will not be found in specialist classes but rather in regular classrooms. (Sriraman and Kyeong, 2011).
By failing to make statutory provision and provide effective teacher training for gifted and talented children the department of education has clearly failed to uphold its ethos and principle of catering to the needs of all pupils. Without the means to achieve their full potential, gifted and talented children are substantially less likely to maximise their capabilities and more likely to underachieve.
3.0 Background

Before delving into the research task at hand it is important to consult previous research in order to gain a thorough understanding of the area one intends to investigate.

3.1 What is Gifted and Talented Education?

Considered the ‘Cinderella’ of educational provision (Eyre, 1997, pg1) due to the characters ability to excel at tasks without support, gifted and talented is an area of education which is often neglected, despite there being an estimated three million profoundly gifted children worldwide (Montgomery, 2013). Passow (1990, pg.2) the founding president of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children stated that: ‘As we near the end of the twentieth century we still do not know what good provision for the highly able should consist of or how to motivate and include those who are socially disadvantaged, nor how to include the able culturally and linguistically’

One possible reason for this is the lack of provision is the further omission of an agreed definition on what it is to be gifted and/or talented. This limits the advice policy makers and researches can give on what style of provision should be provided and sends practitioners mixed messages (Davis et al., 2011). One of the first definitions to be recognised was coined by Marland (1972):
‘Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance’

This definition also included detailed categories relating to areas where persons could excel such as: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual or performing arts and psychomotor ability (Marland (1972), cited in Macintyre, 2008, pg.1). Alternatively CCEA (2007) use the term gifted and talented to refer to ‘those students who are achieving or who have the potential to achieve a level substantially beyond the rest of their peer group in their particular school’ (CCEA, 2007, P.7).

Tunnicliffe (2010, pg.18) states that ‘Definitions of Excellence encapsulate the social values and aspirations of their time and place’ which accounts for the differing attitudes between countries such as the British inclusion of mechanical ingenuity, the American focus on STEM subjects (the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics) and the Chinese ideology of giftedness deriving from effort rather than innate ability (Tunnicliffe, 2010). This shows how giftedness can change or be viewed differently from society to society.

The now world famous IQ test was developed at the beginning of the twentieth century by Binet (1908) and was further developed by Terman (1916) who believed that the sole arbiter of giftedness was intelligence. He defined that a score of one hundred and five was moderately gifted, one hundred and fifty was exceptionally gifted and a score of one hundred and eighty or above was severely or profoundly gifted (Tunnicliffe, 2010,
This method of testing gifted has been used widely and effectively for organisations such as MENSA.

Another take on what it is to be gifted and talented was Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligence theory which believed that by using a person’s unique dominant learning style they would be able to take on and utilise information more productively allowing them to succeed or become more gifted in their learning. The question he asked was ‘Not how bright the pupil is but how is the pupil bright?’ (Tunnicliffe, 2010, pg.21). This revolutionary idea transformed teaching strategies as educators tried to personalise the learning to the pupil according to whether they were a visual, aural or kinesic learner (CCEA, 2007). However this theory has been heavily criticised for lacking ‘Empirical support and thorough research’ (Armstrong, 2009, pg.190). To add to the differing opinions on giftedness is Renzulli’s three ringed model of giftedness (1978, cited in Tunnicliffe, 2010) which divided the area into two main categories: Schoolhouse giftedness, such as tests and quantifiable assignments and creative-productive giftedness which included activities which put value on development on original material designed to suit defined audiences. This was then advanced in 1994 when the tripartite of giftedness was published which showed that the Reuleaux triangle of a Venn diagram consisting of above average ability, task commitment and creativity created the perfect combination for giftedness to flourish.
(Renzulli, 1994)

To further add complexity to the situation a great debate has raged on how to measure giftedness as well as whether talent is somewhat inferior to giftedness. Robeck (1968) classifies talented individuals as having an IQ between 130 and 145 in comparison to gifted persons with an IQ of 145 and 160. Whereas Cohn (1981) divides giftedness in to three categories of: social ability, artistic and intellectual and then further subdivides these in reference to talent rather than basing judgment on IQ (Montgomery, 2013).

Tunnicliffe (2010) defined gifted as potential of a learner in one or more academic areas while talented was described as an excellence in an applied skill. Furthermore Gagne (2004) feels that gifts are natural abilities which grow, or don’t grow, as the case may be into talents. The success of this growth is dependent on the application of the individual as well as other influences and variables which can impact on human performance; however the greatness of the gift can ease the acquisition of the talent.
These numerous opinions, definitions, theories and explanations clearly show the lack of common ground and understanding within this field from its beginnings right up until the present day.

3.2 Double Exceptionality

Buttriss and Callander (2014, pg.45) define double exceptionality as the ‘term used for a child who is gifted and talented yet at the same time has one or more learning difficulties or disabilities’. They further highlight that this subgroup can often remain unidentified due to the constriction of opportunities for achievement which thereby can increase frustration levels, often causing negative or disruptive behaviours, which in turn make it even more difficult to identify the child as gifted. CCEA (2007) acknowledge that these pupils will not exhibit behaviours associated with giftedness and can be disruptive due to a lack of challenge. Traditionally in schools these children are ignored as they are ‘perceived as average or referred for remedial assistance’ (CCEA, 2007, Pg.90). Furthermore schools may choose to focus on the child’s weakness rather than nurturing their strengths and talents, causing the child to underachieve. This group within the gifted and talented spectrum can be surprisingly common as Silverman (1989) found that one third of the sample studied had learning disabilities whist Whitmore (1980) statistically showed that seventy percent of the study showed a deficit of one standard deviation between IQ and school attainments.
Such difficulties these children may encounter could include: Learning difficulties, sensory difficulties, social emotional and behavioural difficulties and cognitive difficulties (Montgomery, 2013) as well as specific diagnosed conditions such as Autistic spectrum disorder, Asperger’s syndrome, Attention Deficit and Hyper Activity Disorder or Dyslexia as well as many more (Sutherland, 2012). It is also important to highlight here the increasing sub group which is forming in Sweden of students who are gifted and talented as well as having Swedish as an additional language (Montgomery, 2013).

Traditionally these students have received little support in their education. Baum (2004) points to historical roots for why provision for gifted and talented pupils with SEN is often lacking; while Montgomery (2013, pg.12) goes further believing that stereotypical characteristics of giftedness concluded that the gifted where somehow ‘healthier, more popular and better adjusted than their less able peers and due to this there couldn’t possibly be populations of gifted students with special needs’. Thompson and Wallace (1998, pg. 76) add that ‘extremely high intelligence often comes with quirks that require great tolerance from the teacher’ indicating that a strength can appear as secondary to a more overt behaviour or need.

The leading researcher Montgomery (2006) has shown the three different cases of gifted with special educational needs one may come across in the classroom; the first being the discrepant who can be quite easily identified due to discrepancies between high sores on ability tests and low achievement in standardised assessments. The second being the
deficit gifted whose disability or learning need will mask their true ability and finally
the deceptive high achiever who will most commonly remain unidentified. These
defined cases heed the warning from Sutherland (2012) for teachers to be alert to the
possibility of gifted and talented children with other labels attached. However as
concern for the double exceptional is only beginning to come to the forefront, these
types of students may remain unsupported for many years to come (Montgomery,
2013).

3.3 Inclusion within the Compulsory classroom

UNESCO (1994, P.4) who state that:

‘ fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together,
wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive
schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students,
accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality
education to all’

By taking an inclusive approach to gifted and talented pupils, such as that for children
with special educational needs, teachers would be able to raise standards in the
classroom for all students (Bates and Munday, 2005). This is further endorsed by
Winstanley (2009) who adds that high ability pupils have a positive effect on their peers
as they become role models and provide a strong work ethic in the classroom. Cohen
and Manion et al (1996) state that it is deceptive to pretend that every child within the
classroom is of a similar ability just for the sake of convenience, and doing this is to
provide an injustice towards the children. However according to Cohen and Manion et al (1996, p.202) this mixed ability approach is positive as it, “forces teachers to recognize the problems of having to stretch the brightest students and having to cater for the less able students.” In addition Montgomery (1996) found the setting of common tasks to which all pupils can contribute their own knowledge and understanding in collaborative activities and so structure their experiences so that all can achieve the higher learning outcomes their gift enables them to.

Inclusive education is a complex and contentious area (Montgomery, 2006) and can be a means to an end rather than the end itself (Barton, 2003). Not all within education are convinced of the benefits of educating gifted and talented children along with their, in some cases, considerably less able peers. Gallagher et al (2011) believe that gifted students require differentiated educational provision in order for their unique academic and social needs to be met. They list two of the most effective strategies to do this are academic grouping and acceleration, and while this can be achieved within the mainstream setting it can be incredibly challenging and disruptive. In addition Hollingsworth (1942) and Pickard (1976) found that of children with IQ’s over one hundred and fifty five, very few could be maintained in an ordinary classroom. Finally by failing to provide for intellectual needs only compounds any socioemotional issues the child may having, cause more disruption to the child and the rest of the class (Halstead, 2002, Valpied, 2005, and Valle et al, 2002), showing that inclusion may not always be the best option for these children.
Without effective teacher training, detailed provision and constructive advice as discussed in the introduction gifted and talented children will continue to fall through the gap between the area of giftedness and that of special educational need and as a result will be more likely to under achieve (Montgomery, 2013).

3.4 Teachers Attitudes towards Gifted and Talented Pupils

F. Sionil Jose (1968, pg.45) wisely wrote:

‘The influence of teachers extends beyond the classroom, well into the future. It is they who shape and enrich the minds of the young, who touch their hearts and souls. It is they who shape a nation's future’

Teachers play a fundamental role in the education of their students, this position is even more so important in the education of gifted and talented child. Despite this importance many teachers remain inefficient in how properly help a gifted and talented child reach their full potential. A study conducted by Gallagher et al (2011) found that the majority of the teachers surveyed many had very little knowledge about the development of the gifted and talented and that only those who had first-hand experience, rather than any formal training, were equipped to work with these types of children. In addition this limited knowledge produced a correlation between their viewpoints which was often negative. In addition many alluded to the identification of such children to be a major point of concern and the adverse connotations it could have.
‘Teachers are the sole human capital of the education system’ (David, 2007, pg. 2).

Their attitudes towards children who is the single most important factor affecting student’s success according to Barber and Mourshed (2007). David (2007) highlights the main characteristics for teaching the gifted are a positive attitude towards high achievement and an enjoyment of teaching challenging, innovative and inventive students. This is further highlighted by Sutherland (2012) who states that teachers must believe in the existence of gifted and talented children and to be on the lookout for these types of students who display particular abilities as well as trying to challenge children in their learning and never fail to be surprised by their capabilities.

Armstrong (2011) also found through case studies that many schools may claim to be inclusive towards the gifted and talented but in reality are not. This viewpoint is strengthened by Elkholm and Modigh (2011, P.22) who found that practitioners expressed willingness, to work with gifted and talented but many state that they are unsure of how to do this effectively. This shows a lack of confidence in the delivery of gifted and talented education and is therefore something that schools need to develop if it is to be successful.

In conclusion, it is clear to see that there is a gap in legislation and thorough guidance for teachers on how to provide best for the gifted and talented pupils in their class, particularly those with special educational needs.
Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to research teachers' attitudes towards gifted and talented education with a particular focus on double exceptionality within Swedish Compulsory schools in Southern Sweden. Therefore, the writer has chosen to investigate the following questions:

• What are teachers' attitudes towards gifted and talented students?
• What are teachers' attitudes towards and knowledge of gifted and talented students with double exceptionality?
4.0: Methodology

In order to learn about the different ways in which teachers view gifted and talented education the researcher has outlined a research method to enable quality and authentic data to be collected. This research was conducted during the period between April and May of 2015 during the writer’s semester abroad in Sweden.

4.1 Paradigm of study

It was decided that the paradigm of the study should be interpretivist. A Paradigm according to Cohen et al (2011, p.5) is, “a way of looking at or researching phenomena.” An interpretivist approach allows the researcher to understand the particular intricacies of the group under study without disrupting the natural order (Thomas, 2013) Furthermore Cohen et al. (2011, pg.17) state that the interpretive paradigm is "characterized by a concern for the individual”. Therefore in the case of this study the researcher hopes to better understand the attitudes towards gifted and talented children within the Swedish compulsory school. However it is important to note that an interpretivist approach can limit the researcher as Cohen et al. (2013, pg.21) argue that some interpretivist studies ‘have abandoned scientific procedures of verification meaning generalisations of behaviour cannot be discovered’.
4.2 Settings

The settings chosen were two compulsory schools in the Southern Sweden area which were incredibly different. The first, School A, was located in an affluent area and had a population of largely Swedish children whereas the second, School B, was situated in a low income area with high levels of immigration and the school population reflected this. While the research does not focus on socio-economic background, it is important to note the possible influence this factor may have on teacher’s attitudes towards gifted and talented education.

4.3 Participants

The participants of this research were invited to be part of the study having been introduced to the writer through internships from February to April 2015. During this time the researcher was able to form a professional relationship with all of the teachers which made it much easier to conduct the interview and focus group as well as put the participant at ease. The participants were unintentionally two male and two female and had experience in teaching ranging from two until ten years. Furthermore all participants had graduated in different years and from different instructions which allowed for an interesting discussion on the delivery of gifted and talented education in teacher training programs.
4.4 Research tools

For the purpose of this research the writer has opted to use a mixed method approach of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Initially semi-structured interviews were only to be used however due to time constraints within one of the schools a focus group was formed to limit the amount of time taken up by the research and to allow as many teachers as possible to participate.

4.41 Interviews

The writer has opted to use a semi-structured interview to collect data on the area of study. Thomas (2013, p.198) states that this offers, “the best of both worlds as far as interviewing is concerned, combining the structure of a list of issues to be covered together with the freedom to follow up points as necessary.” The reason behind this choice of method is that it opens up the study to much more in-depth and thorough research and provides a comprehensive insight into the approach of inclusion within the Swedish compulsory school. This method was chosen to allow an in-depth and thorough discussion with a practitioner, but also allowed for other issues to be addressed. Due to being constricted to a short time frame it was therefore the most logical approach as opposed to sending out questionnaires to various teachers and risking a low response rate. Furthermore this method did not impact heavily on the writer’s studies as well as infringing on the time of the participants. The writer understands that due to the small scale of this study the results cannot be representative of teacher’s attitudes
towards gifted and talented children as a whole, but rather offer insight into the area. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix Two.

4.42 Focus Group

According to Cohen et al (2011) the use of the focus group is growing in popularity as an educational research instrument. Focus groups are a form of group interview where the success of the procedure relies on the interaction within the group who discuss the topic supplied by the teacher, yielding a collective, rather than an individual perspective (Morgan, 1988) and it is from this interaction of the group that the data emerges. Despite the writer not initially intending to use focus groups as a research instrument, due to time constraints in one of the settings it became the only viable option. However this type of research method did provide some advantages such as encouraging all participants to speak out in a safe environment as well as giving a group rather than an individual opinion, and this was clearly seen through during the focus group session. However as stated in Cohen et al (2011, pg. 154) focus groups can lead to ‘non-participation by some members and dominance by others and require skilful facilitation and management by the researcher’. In this particular focus group one member did dominate the discussion in some areas, yet as this participant was the only one with experience the writer feels that this governance was justified and added great value to the data gathered during this session. A copy of the Focus Group schedule can be found in Appendix Three.
4.5 Data collection

The data for this research was collected during April and May of 2015 at mutually agreed times within the two school settings. All participants agreed to be voice recorded at the writers convince which made the transcription process much easier. After transcribing the focus group and interview the writer analysed the data from a socio cultural perspective.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

When undertaking research it is important to remember the ethical considerations surrounding the topic you are intending to study and your participants. As the researcher choose to interview teachers therefore it was vital to first gain permission from the school and then the individuals themselves. This was in conjunction with the Swedish Research Councils (2002) consent principle which requires the researcher to highlight the participant’s right to decide if they want to be involved in the study as well as informing the participants of the studies aim and purpose. The researcher provided a detailed cover letter to each participant outlining the study and highlighting the right to withdraw at any time for any or no reason. A copy of this can be found in Appendix One. Furthermore as a gesture of good will the researcher offered an electronic copy of the completed research paper to all participants so that they may see how their contributions have been utilised. The third and fourth requirements of the Swedish
Research Council (2002) confidentiality state that all collected data information about individuals has to be anonymous and that the personal information from the participators only could be used in research purposes. This is particularly important at the interview stage where the participants will surrender their total anonymity due to the interviews taking place face to face (Thomas, 2013). Therefore the researcher assured all participants of their complete anonymity as well as how all data would be safely and securely stored and that upon completion of the research all data would be destroyed. By following these guidelines the researcher feels that all interviews and focus groups were ethically conducted and that no harm whatsoever came to the participants during the duration of the study.

4.7 Methodology Analysis

The chosen method was without doubt the correct approach for this study and the writer feels it was a productive and enjoyable experience. Carrying out a semi-structured interview and a focus group, the writer were able to fulfil the research questions while also being able to ask informal or unrehearsed questions related to the topic. If this research was to be repeated the writer would like to improve upon the size of the sample as if time had permitted the writer would like to have interviewed teachers throughout the different age groups in the school, as well as the principals and include other schools in the study. Furthermore the writer feels that the research may have been better conducted in their home country due to the vastly greater numbers of contacts there.
Due to the short time the writer has been living in Sweden there have not been many opportunities to form ties with a large number of schools and this, the writer feels, has had a significant impact of the depth of research which could have been achieved. The writer feels that it was unrealistic to expect the same quality and quantity of research one had hoped for here in Sweden in comparison to the writer’s home country and if the research was to be repeated the writer would ensure prior to the beginning of the research process that an appropriate number of schools could be utilised. In addition, the writer also feels that the language barrier proved to be influential during the research process as it often restricted the flow of conversation and time had to be taken out of discussion to explain concepts and definitions. Despite this, the researcher does feel that the data collected, while it might not be representative, can give a fair insight into teacher’s attitudes towards gifted and talented students in Swedish compulsory schools.
5.0 Results

In this section the writer will state the result of the data collection previously outlined in the methodology.

5.1 Research Question One: Teacher’s attitudes towards gifted and talented students.

What is Gifted and Talented?

Having already stated some of the theory and historical context behind the development of gifted and talented education, the writer posed the question to the practitioners to gain an insight into their personal opinion. During both data gathering sessions all teachers were very positive towards the idea of gifted and talented education. There was some confusion as to what it was to be considered gifted and talented and whether this referred only to the exceptional children or the ones at the top of the class. Furthermore the participants had differing responses towards gifted and talented education ranging from ‘Special groups of children’, ‘the top group in the class’ as well as ‘the need to challenge them’.

Most teachers recognised gifted and talented education as part of everyday classroom life with statements such as ‘Many children can be gifted’ and ‘I think there is a kid in every class’. However some did feel that while students can be a ‘step ahead’ than their peers in a class, this does not necessarily mean that they were gifted.
All those interviewed felt it was important to challenge gifted and talented children, and that as teachers it was part of their duty to adapt their teaching style for the gifted and talented child or children’s benefit. However all eluded to the challenge of this differentiated teaching due to time constraints within the school setting as well as catering for the lower ability students in the class, whom they recognised ‘can take up a lot of your time’.

Government provision

With regards to provision or government approved guidelines on how to best educate these children, all agreed that this was something that they would like to see. They felt it would enable them to become better equipped at recognising and educating gifted and talented children as well as getting them as much support as they needed. One participant did point out that by ‘law the needs of all children should be catered for’, however this was then retaliated as no one could agree on what type of provision should be made for these types of children such as acceleration or differenced learning and that if statutory provision was made then this matter would be made clearer.

Teacher Training

When the discussion turned to the participants own teacher training half had received some small instruction on gifted and talented education while the others had had
nothing. Those that did receive this education felt that while it had been a very small part of their degree that it had benefitted their professional development and they left better equipped to deal with these types of children while those that did not felt it would have been something which they would have enjoyed and would have been expeditious to their teaching. Furthermore, while none of the participants had been given the opportunity to take part in professional development days to do with gifted and talented education it is something which all seemed interested in and felt that if the opportunity arose that they would take it.
5.2 Research Question Two: Teacher’s attitudes towards and knowledge of gifted and talented students with double exceptionality.

What is Double Exceptionality?

The term double exceptionality received mixed reviews from the participants. Two had never heard of the term, nor had any experience in dealing with these types of children, another had also never heard of this terminology but upon clarification realised in fact that they had seen two doubly exceptional children in practice. The participant with the most experience and knowledge of the area in fact currently had one such pupil in their grade three class.

Teachers Experience

The types of doubly exceptional children discovered through this research varied widely from dyslexia with a talented for Math ‘He got 150 out of 150 in the Grade Three national exam’ and although one other participant was unsure as to the specific diagnosis, the information provided hints at Autistic Spectrum disorder and Attention Deficient disorder.

Given that one of the participating schools is located in a culturally diverse area the discussion turned to how having Swedish as a second language could be considered as a learning need as well as a gift. The example was given of one child who had learnt
‘Swedish within a year as well as speaking English, Swahili, Somalian and Arabic’. The participant felt that for many children in the school, ‘language is their first learning barrier’ and some of the children’s ability to overcome this could and should be considered a talent or gift.

Provision

For doubly exceptional children it was felt by some of the participants that statutory provision and guidelines would be beneficial as due to their traditionally low position within the classroom. Furthermore they also felt that with these guidelines teachers would be better equipped to educate and find these types of children and the profile of different types of giftedness such as double exceptionality would be better recognised. However others did feel that if these types of guidelines were introduced that the area could be monopolised as it would be at the teachers discretion as to who was labelled as being gifted and talented.

With regards to the work of Montgomery (2011) none of the participants were familiar with her research but agreed that the first possible type of doubly exceptional child, ‘The Discrepant’ would be the easiest to spot within the mainstream classroom. In setting A, the participants all agreed that the second example of doubly exceptional child, ‘The Deficit’ could also be easily identified within their school due to the
language barrier present there where as setting B felt that both the second and third example, ‘The Deceptive’, would be the most difficult to discover within their classes.
6.0 Discussion

Having completed the research the writer has been able to link together the theory and observations to create an insight into teacher’s attitudes towards gifted and talented education in Swedish Compulsory schools.

6.1 Research Question One: Teacher’s attitudes towards gifted and talented students.

Within the background to this research, the writer has shown the many different opinions regarding what it is to be gifted and talented; this was also reflected in the responses given by the participants. Some of the responses produced the same connotations those of pervious research such as that of Marland (1972) and CCEA (2007) while others choose to look at the area from a much more different perspective. These mixed responses, the writer feels could be as a result of the intricacy of the research area itself and the lack of agreed definition which then can confuse policy makers and teaching professionals alike. Another possible reason for the lack of understanding and synchronistic answers could also be as a result of the minimal or complete lack of gifted and talented education during teacher training programs.
With regards to the potential numbers of gifted and talented students the results proved to mostly disagree with previous research such as Montgomery (2011) as a number of participants felt that gifted and talented education was a daily part of classroom life and that there could be many gifted pupils within every class, if only that talent could be discovered. Whereas others felt this title could only be reserved for the elite. This clearly shows the importance of an educator's own personal opinion as to what it is to be gifted and talented; which the writer feels, has a major impact on the outcome for the child. An example effect of this can be shown by a teacher who feels that gifted and talented education is reserved only for the exceptional and genius children the number of pupils who could benefit from a gifted program or support would be greatly reduced, causing these children to possibly underachieve. However if the teacher chooses to follow the definition outlined by CCEA (2007) more children, if the writer's opinion, would be given the opportunity to avail of a gifted program or support and therefore be more likely to reach their full potential in education. However it must also be noted that by Swedish law (LGR11, 2011) the needs of all pupils must be met, but as the participant eluded to in discussion it is often those students who are low attaining and who take up the majority of the teacher's time who become the focus of and benefit from this ideology rather than the gifted and talented students.

Despite the topic of inclusion has becoming a central part of modern education, many still view it as focusing largely on low attaining students. The results disagreed with this
idea and showed that the participants felt that gifted and talented students should be included within the mainstream class due to the student’s possible ability to help others whilst also benefitting themselves, thus agreeing with previous research such as Bates and Munday (2005), Winstanley (2009) and Cohen and Manion et al (1996). Many of the participants stated that they differentiated the class work to allow some of the brighter students to be challenged however they failed to recognise some of the other methods such as those stated in Gallagher et al (2011) which could be effective in allowing children to discover the true power of their gift. Again, the writer feels this is as a result of non-excitant guidelines at government level and a lack of adequate teacher training, as without this knowledge how can one expect teachers to implement it into their practice?

In conclusion, from the responses gathered it is clear that of the participants interviewed, all had a largely positive approach towards gifted and talented students. Furthermore their desire for more information and training was overwhelming, showing their keen interest in the area. The participants met the requirements of David (2007) such as enjoying the challenge of educating a gifted child as well as simply believing in their existence. However despite the participants good intentions due to their limited knowledge of the area there was a lack of confidence as how to best teach a gifted and talented child, which can then transpire down to the child itself, heightening the risk of detection and underachievement. The writer feels that while the participants endeavour to give their best to their students, without the proper guidance being available to them;
it cannot be feasible for them to deliver the most effective education possible for these children. Therefore more needs to be done at a higher level within Sweden before the type of provision required by gifted and talented children is there for them to avail of.
6.2 Research Question Two: Teacher’s attitudes towards and knowledge of gifted and talented students with double exceptionality.

Based largely on the work of Montgomery, double exceptionality is a larky unknown entity within the gifted and talented world. Therefore the researcher was pleasantly surprised when one of the participants was familiar with the term. However in accordance with research conducted by Gallagher et al (2011) it was the participant who had had first-hand experience in working with a doubly exceptional child who was most ofey with the area. This, the researcher feels, is a failing of government to provide adequate training for teachers in this field, as without the knowledge they cannot possibly be equipped to deal with this situation.

The wide range of identified doubly exceptional children proved a positive, if not unplanned, inclusion to the results, despite the work of Silverman (1989) and Whitmore (1980) highlighting their commonality. While these results agreed with the literature, the discussion of the inclusion of language as both a gift and learning need is an area which the writer feels more research is required, due to the undecided opinion of whether it can be considered special educational need alongside conditions such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Dyslexia.
As with research question one there was a clear desire for more provision, support and guidelines to be made available to the teachers. However as recognised by Passow (1990) the lack of good and correct provision on a global scale is a serious problem to the area and as a result the current state of the provision of doubly exceptional gifted and talented education can sadly be justified.

None of the participants were familiar with the work of Diane Montgomery, a founding and break through researcher in the field of double exceptionality. Due to the lack of training available to the participants this was hardly surprising and surely if such resources were accessible, the theoretical makeup of the course would be based on Montgomery’s large research. The results agreed with her prediction of the three common types of doubly exceptional child and in the writer’s opinion only further highlighted the need of teacher to look beyond the learning need and see very child’s potential.

In conclusion, as with research question one the results of teacher’s attitudes towards gifted and talented students with double exceptionality were very positive as teachers were fully engaged with the subject matter. As with all areas of gifted and talented education, in the writer’s opinion this area requires even more research, provision and guidelines due to its complexity and the ease at which children’s true abilities can become over looked. Knowledge and understanding are the key ingredients to making the life of doubly exceptional children as fulfilled as possible and without such components, it is hard to see how the current position can be improved. Regardless of
provision, this area, which is forever over shadowed by the needs of low ability students’ needs more worldwide attention in order for the first steps to be taken towards the ultimate goal of a practical and engaging education which will challenge and test these children, allowing them to research their full potential in education.

With regards to further research, the writer feels that there is a lot of potential in this area and many aspects which have yet to be discovered. Given the global need for gifted and talented provision the writer believes that the thoughts and opinions of policy makers would be intriguing as well as researching the personal beliefs of gifted and talented children themselves and how they feel their education should progress.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent

2/10/2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Nicola Friel and I am a third year B.Ed. student at Linnaeus University, Sweden. This year, under the supervision of Marina Welholm, I am completing a dissertation on the provision made for gifted and talented pupils in Swedish Schools, with a particular focus on those students with special educational needs. I am writing to request the involvement of your school as one of the research settings for my study. The title of my dissertation is ‘The Cinderella of Education: An investigation into the attitudes of Swedish compulsory school teachers towards Gifted and Talented pupils, with a particular focus on those students with double exceptionality’ with two central research questions: What are teacher’s attitudes towards gifted and talented students? And what are teacher’s attitudes towards and knowledge of gifted and talented students with double exceptionality?

If you were to allow the participation of your school in this study I would require that yourself, to complete a short interview or focus group. This interview would be conducted at a mutually convenient time and I would be quite happy to come to the school to conduct the interview myself. If this is possible please leave contact details in the space provided at the end of the questionnaire or directly contact myself.

All data from the interviews would be treated with confidentiality and with full anonymity, and your school will not be named in the final dissertation. I am happy to discuss further any of the matters raised in this letter, and am willing to meet with you in person at your convenience. As I am trying to finalise my research I would really appreciate a prompt reply (my contact details can be found below). Alternatively, my supervisor Marina Welholm would also be willing to answer any of your questions regarding the research study.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Friel
NCF01@Stran.ac.uk
Contact Telephone Number: 07726948007
Appendix B: Interview schedule
General Starter questions: To be circled
Gender:

Age
20 – 25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56 and over

Years’ of experience teaching
0-5 1
6-10
11-15
16-20
21-25
26 and over
Year of Graduation/Qualified as a teacher:

Gifted and Talented Questions:
1. What comes to mind when you think of Gifted and Talented education?
2. What is your experience of teaching a child who was gifted or talented and if so how or in what way were they gifted and talented?
3. If you have how many/often?
4. If so, how did you educate them?

Double exceptionality Questions:
6. What comes to mind when you hear the term double exceptionality in relation to gifted and talented education? Have you ever thought about children like this before and in what ways?
Definition: Buttriss and Callander (2014, pg.45) define double exceptionality as the ‘term used for a child who is gifted and
talented yet at the same time has one or more learning difficulties or disabilities’.
7. After hearing this explanation do you think that there have been children like this in your teaching experience?
9. What do you think would be the outcome if statutory provision and teacher education was made available for gifted and talented children with double exceptionality?
10. What effect do you think it would have on the children in the classroom?
5. The researcher Montgomery has highlighted three types of gifted child (Please see below) which of these do you identify with the most, see most commonly in your classes or as a teacher feel most confident working with?

“The leading researcher Montgomery (2006) has shown the three different cases of gifted with special educational needs one may come across in the classroom; the first being the discrepant who can be quite easily identified due to discrepancies between high scores on ability tests and low achievement in standardised assessments. The second being the deficit gifted whose disability or learning need will mask their true ability and finally the deceptive high achiever who will most commonly remain unidentified.”

Statutory provision Questions:
11. Sweden currently has no explicit statutory provision made for children who are gifted and talented, what is your opinion of this?
12. How do you think provision should be made and in what ways?
13. How do you think the profile of gifted and talented children would be raised if such provision was made and in what ways?

Teacher Education Questions:
• How was gifted and talented education or another terminology discussed/taught during your teacher training?
• If no, do you think your training would have been benefited and in what ways?
• If yes, did this benefit your professional development and in what ways?
• Since you began teaching have there been any professional development days/courses made available to you which discussed gifted and talented education?