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Annette Rasmussen
Christian Ydesen

Cultivating Excellence in Education

A Critical Policy Study on Talent

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Preface

Writing a book on excellence and talent in education has provided us with the opportunity to systematically reflect on the findings and perspectives emerging from several smaller projects, project parts, and publications in our previous work. In this sense, the book reflects our attempt to connect the dots and to engage more clearly with the contemporary global educational field in terms of talent and excellence. It also reflects an interdisciplinary undertaking to connect with and speak out to the existing research in the fields of policy research, comparative education, sociology of education, and history of education. Coming from a solid stance in the Danish case, this endeavour has allowed us to frame and activate our diverse – and sometimes even contradictory – empirical materials in a new and more coherent way that enabled us to identify salient and recurring patterns across time and space.

The origin of the book goes back some 13 years to 2006, when Aalborg University became engaged in the evaluation of a project on talent classes in Northern Jutland (see Chap. 1). On the initiative of a local school principal, a project on talent classes obtained support from the Ministry of Education in the school year 2006–2007 and again in 2007–2008. Annette Rasmussen played a central part in the evaluations, which took place in relation to both projects. The amount of research carried out in connection to the projects was possible not least due to her postdoctoral grant from the Independent Research Fund Denmark (autumn 2006). Professor Palle Rasmussen also played a central role in establishing and maintaining contact with the project holders and participating in the research at the time.

During the initial project phases, we relied heavily on cooperation with the project holders and all the participating parties, including students, parents, teachers, coordinators, school administrators, and politicians. We want to express our deep gratitude to them for generously sharing their time, knowledge, and experiences – without them and their willingness to cooperate, this project would not have been possible.

To engage more strongly with the global educational field, including historical perspectives, we found it useful to connect the findings of the Danish project with the ongoing work in Christian Ydesen's project 'The Global History of the OECD in Education'. This project uses a database of archival documents collected from the

OECD Archives in Paris, which allowed us to easily identify policy documents pertaining to talent and excellence in education since the very foundation of the OECD in 1961.

We did not accomplish the empirical and analytical work alone. Several student helpers and research assistants were engaged in the process and made valuable contributions: Frederik Forrai Ørskov and Camilla Dam Karlsen for systematically finding archival sources for Chap. 2, Helle Præstekjær for transcribing interviews from the first year, and Helle Vilain for conducting fieldwork in the second year, including interviews and transcribing the results. We relied on them greatly and want to thank them for their work in supporting our efforts.

Preliminary research related to the content of this volume has been presented at numerous conferences, including the Oxford Ethnography and Education Conference in 2010, the European Conference of Educational Research in 2012 and in 2016, and the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting in Montreal, Canada, in 2017.

We want to thank the reviewers for providing very constructive comments and for encouraging our work. We also wish to thank those who provided written comments on early drafts of the chapters, especially Professor John Krejsler, of Aarhus University, Denmark, who kindly agreed to critically review Chap. 8.

Finally, we would like to thank our research group colleagues at the Centre for Education Policy Research, Aalborg University, especially Professor Palle Rasmussen, whose contributions and moral and personal support during the initial project phases were invaluable. Final thanks go to our families for their enduring support.

Aalborg, Denmark

Annette Rasmussen
Christian Ydesen

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Christian Ydesen, MA in History and Philosophy (2007) and PhD (2011), is professor (MSO) at Aalborg University, Denmark (since 2019). His dissertation is titled *The Rise of High-Stakes Educational Testing in Denmark* (1920–1970) and published at Peter Lang Verlag. He is the PI of the project 'The Global History of the OECD in Education' funded by the Aalborg University talent programme and the project 'Education Access under the Reign of Testing and Inclusion' funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark. He has been a visiting scholar at the University of Edinburgh (2008–2009, 2016), the University of Birmingham (2013), and the University of Oxford (2019) and published several articles on topics such as educational testing, international organisations, accountability, educational psychology, and diversity in education from historical and international perspectives.

Chapter 1
Introduction: Studying the Cultivation of Excellence and Talent in Education

Introduction

Excellence in education has become a mantra that has yielded several hits on the Internet. There is, for instance, a Global Talent Index, which measures talent and ranks countries according to a number of excellence criteria (Global Talent Index 2015). The global competition between nation-states and their education systems and the ensuing focus on excellence in education are widely manifested at the national level in initiatives such as the establishment of talent centres, the allocation of resources and funds for talent development, and the organization of activities to identify and differentiate talent in school contexts. Thus, excellence and talent have entered the education political agenda at global, regional, and local levels.

The political agenda of cultivating excellence and talent in education can be seen as symptomatic of wider global education policies that coincide with performativity-oriented moves in education (Ball 2015; Jeffrey and Troman 2012; Rasmussen et al. 2014; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Tomlinson 2005; van Zanten 2009, 2015). These policies work to provide systems in which education becomes self-referential and reified for consumption, where individuals 'want' what the system needs in order to perform well (Lyotard 1984, p. 62) as they are encouraged to see their own development as linked to and provided for by the 'growth' of the institution and the nation.

Education policy analyses of shifts from egalitarian projects of schooling towards more elite-oriented strategies have centred on the increasingly hegemonic view that, in a world of global economic competitiveness, every national economy needs high levels of knowledge and skills, access to which is rationed among those regarded best able to benefit (Ball 2008; Sennett 2007; Tomlinson 2008). This shift is often visible in national policies that show more concern for the Programme for International Student Assessment's results on the drop in numbers in the top categories than about the increase in social inequality in outcomes (Sellar and Lingard 2014). Increasingly, policy agendas seem to be more focused on catering to gifted

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and talented students than on social justice and inclusion issues, although it is not at all clear what is meant by talent or how it is identified and developed.

Aim, Purpose, and Approach

This book takes a critical look at this policy, the space in which it operates, and its enactment by means of analyses based on national and transnational policy documents and studies of concrete talent programmes in local school contexts, including their agents and stakeholders. Thus, it examines the education policy background – globally, historically, nationally, and regionally – for specific talent activities via the following themes:

- International and historical discourses on talent and its interactions with education
- History of talent and educational differentiation in Denmark
- Talent class activities in a local Danish school context
- Different conceptions and types of talent and their linkage to social categories
- Differentiated teaching and didactical planning in talent classes
- Policy perceptions of talent class activities among local teachers
- Education and talent from a global perspective

The book focuses on analysing educational talent from an education policy perspective and the role of classification processes in education (Ball 2013). For educational systems to exert a symbolic reproduction of social order, specific forms of classification, segregation, and evaluation have been developed (Bourdieu 1989; van Zanten 2005). The underlying assumption of the book is that classification practices in education, including the identification of talent, correspond to elite tastes (consumption), associations, and dispositions that provide the bases of inequality (Bernstein 2000; Bourdieu 1984, 1997). Therefore, such practices represent selection processes in a wider sense, since the state imposes cognitive classifications of the social world that naturalize and encourage broad acceptance of the social order (Swartz 2013). Focusing on the cultivation of excellence and talent in education systems can yield important findings about the nature of inequality and its symbolic reproduction in education, which might be overlooked if only disadvantaged groups are considered (Khan 2012; Savage 2015). Thus, to understand and explain how inequality arises within an educational system, we need to study the student groups with good resources and study habits, as well as the institutions that develop and reproduce their social position.

Although special education has been the subject of much research, the education of the gifted and talented has not, or has been addressed mainly from pedagogical, psychological, and developmental perspectives (e.g. Gagné 2005; Heller 2004; Sternberg and Davidson 2005) and not from a sociological policy perspective. To contribute to a critical discussion on policy priorities in education, we consider it necessary to unfold and analyse expressions of excellence and talent from multiple

social and policy perspectives. In that sense, the book falls in line with the recent research endeavour launched by Helen Gunter (2018, p. 4) seeking to "(…) expose trends within governing strategies designed to depoliticise education policy" and to create awareness of the political dimensions of education policies in general and public services education in particular.

The academic basis of the book is the sociology of education, and its analyses and discussions draw pragmatically on the sociological lenses presented by Pierre Bourdieu, Basil Bernstein, and Richard Sennett. We further lean on the field of education policy studies, where we rely on the work of, among others, Stephen Ball, Bob Lingard, Gita Steinar-Khamsi, Robert Cowen, and Stephen Carney.

We conceptualize policy as both documents produced at the transnational and national levels and policy productions enacted at the regional and school levels. Therefore, the analysis involves multilevel processes of *interpreting* the meaning of documents and of *translating* texts into action (Ball et al. 2012). At the level of transnational policies, such analysis implies interpretation of the strategies for cultivating excellence in education, whereas, at the school level, it implies analysing the transfer, translation and transformation processes of creating local and institutional texts and practices, and embedding them within activities such as talent classes (Cowen 2006). This analytical lens offers mainly a vertical perspective ranging from the global space to the local context. But in order to avoid the perils of methodological nationalism (Marginson 2016) – i.e. the assumption "that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world." (Wimmer and Schiller 2002 cited in Marginson 2016, p. 293) – we add the analytical concept of 'policyscapes', put forth by Stephen Carney (2009), offering a horizontal and topographical awareness of the global space in which education policies on excellence and talent operate (see Chap. 8).

At the transnational policy level, the analysis focuses empirically on policy documents from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in combination with other relevant policy documents such as documents from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). At the national level, the Danish case is based on government documents, funding schemes, and the establishment of local projects as markers for the enactment of policy in local school practices.

Based on empirical analyses of policy documents from the OECD archive and the Danish government, project organizations, and the teaching and participants in these organizations, the book analyses and discusses how talent is understood and practised in the Danish public education system as part of a global education space; what characterizes the 'talented students' (within the context); the students' differing understandings of their own talent in relation to their school, social background, and motives; as well as their expected outcome from participation in talent class activities. The overall topic is how talent is understood and practised in education policies – globally, nationally, and locally – and possible social consequences of such cultivation of excellence in education.

Selecting a Case Study: The Case of Denmark in a Global Setting

As a vehicle for understanding the workings of education policies aiming to cultivate excellence and talent in education, Denmark serves as an exemplary case. It retains some of the features of the traditional universal welfare states found in the Scandinavian region. The Scandinavian welfare states are often highlighted – including in Scandinavian self-understanding – as model societies with high levels of happiness, social equality, and democratic commitment; low levels of corruption; and free education and health care for all (e.g. OECD Better Life Index; Ydesen and Buchardt 2020). In this sense, the Scandinavian welfare states are often treated as being in a league of their own (e.g. Wacquant 2008, 2013). This notion of the Scandinavian model being exemplary finds strong support in the widely used welfare state typologies developed by Gösta Esping-Andersen. These typologies define the Scandinavian welfare states as belonging to what the author calls the social-democratic regime type, characterized by principles of universalism and the decommodification of social rights (Esping-Andersen 1990). The methodological benefit from using the case of Denmark in this context emerges in the contrast between the policy priorities of social equality found in the universal welfare state model and the elitist aims found in policies of excellence and talent in education. Over the last couple of decades, the Danish welfare state has been permeated by the general global competition between states, neoliberal reforms, and the cultivation of excellence in education in particular. Thus, the Danish case is highly contrasting and critical in illustrating how global policies aiming to cultivate excellence and talent in education are making transformations in a national context that has hitherto focused on social equality and in which the cultivation of talent has been controversial.

Fieldwork Background and Methods

The talent class study took place in a provincial town in Northern Jutland in Denmark. The talent class enjoyed financial support from a programme calling for experimental projects (by the Ministry of Education) supporting talented pupils and had the characteristics of an experiment. The initiators of the experiment (local municipal council and school management) wanted an evaluation of the project and contracted Aalborg University. Accordingly, research on the talent class was initiated and carried out as a process evaluation of the programme (Rasmussen and Rasmussen 2007, 2016). The research questions were as follows: How is the organisational framework behind the project constructed? What are the pedagogical practices of the talent class? And what are the characteristics of the talent class pupils and their talents?

Thus, aiming at an analysis of the programme in its political, pedagogical, and social contexts, the research was designed and conducted as an ethnographic field study, which was considered suitable for such broad and qualitative questions. This study was repeated the following year, when the project initiator reapplied and obtained financial support for an additional year, which also implied an extension of the project to include more talent classes and involve more educational institutions and actors. This project involved the same type of evaluation as the previous year, but it was reported separately (Rasmussen and Vilain 2008).

The talent classes were organized as after-school activities that the students attended in addition to their regular classes. Teaching activities took place in the afternoon once a week and at occasional 'talent camps' on weekends and were aimed at eighth- and ninth-grade students (aged 15–16 years) in public/municipal primary/lower secondary school who wanted extra school challenges. The location was the general upper secondary education school housing in the area. Most of the teachers also came from upper secondary schools.

The fieldwork involved a detailed examination of the talent classes in the context of municipal and national education policies. During both school years, from August to June, the research included studies of background documents, the observation of lessons, the framing of pedagogic practices (Bernstein 2000), and other activities in relation to the talent class programme, especially regarding the interactions of the students and their roles vis-à-vis the teachers, interviews with the students and teachers, and a subsequent Internet-based survey for the parents of the students.

Most teachers involved in the programme activities were interviewed to obtain their views on the classes and students. All four teachers involved in the first year were interviewed and nine of the 13 teachers (the nine most involved) in the second year were interviewed. A total of 38 students were interviewed: 21 out of 30 in the first year and 17 out of 53 in the second year. When we selected students for interviews in the first year, we wanted students from all municipal schools in the recruitment area, as well as representation from both classes that year. We allowed students to volunteer for the interviews, which an overwhelming number of them did. In the second year, the selection criteria for the student interviews included representation of all three programmes/classes that year, among both boys and girls, and representation of all home schools in the municipality. The interviews took place either in direct connection with the teaching activities in the programme or at the home school. Interviews were conducted at the end of the yearly programme, so that the talent programme activities could be referred to and constitute a natural perspective for the interview theme.

The interviews followed an open approach that gave ample opportunities for the students to elaborate on their school experiences. We asked what qualities they associated with the word *talent*, what talents they had, how they perceived themselves as talented, what made them participate in talent class activities, and how this participation related to other activities, friends, and family and to their school life in general. The students were introduced to and asked about the concept of talent in the context of school and naturally linked their answers to the particular educational context of the talent class. They could have had other associations had the interviews

been conducted elsewhere. Thus, they held preconceived notions of talent according to political categorizations and their answers and associations appeared to be elaborate reflections of talent with particular regard to the programme. This necessitated a break with preconceived categories, which could be obtained by combining the interview data with the other forms of data in the analysis.

Almost all of the students' parents completed the survey, with a response ratio of 81 out of a possible 83 (Rasmussen 2011). The purpose of this survey was to obtain information concerning the social background of the participants. The questionnaire asked about family and living conditions, the parents' education and occupation, and cultural and social orientations, including school choice and experience and leisure activities.

Narrative, Content, and Book Structure

The book's narrative moves from the perspective of general education policy to perspectives of local pedagogy and back. It starts with broad transnational and global perspectives on talent in education policy and then zooms in on concrete activities of talent classes, teaching, and students in the Danish context. It then zooms back out and offers analyses on a more general level and linking with the global context. The presentation thus also moves between the social and personal perspectives and between the contemporary and historical perspectives as it discusses how the development of talent affects the participants as well as the public school system (*Folkeskole*) as a societal institution. Some of the chapters have a mainly descriptive function, since the case study and ethnographic method precisely aim to achieve understanding through extensive description, analysis, and interpretation of the phenomenon in question. For this reason, the form and content of the chapters vary as they serve different purposes in the study and builds on different types of data analyses.

More specifically, the analytical journey of the book can best be described as an hourglass-shaped endeavour. The book takes its starting point at the international level. As such, Chap. 2 adopts an international policy perspective in outlining the diachronic characteristics of the concept of talent since the 1960s. The focus is on the various connotations of talent and the concept's interactions with education in a broad sense. The chapter draws on conceptual history to shed light on the relation between concepts and policy discourse. The focus is on the meanings of talent and their implications in terms of policy, including a brief discussion about discursive struggles with other prominent discourses in the international field of education. This type of analysis serves the purpose of understanding the main configurations of the global policy space associated with excellence and talent in education. The empirical base of this chapter is drawn mainly from the OECD Archives in Paris and research literature about UNESCO, the OECD and UNESCO being the key international organizations working in education in the second half of the twentieth century and that continue to do so with increased intensity.

The next analytical focus is at the national and regional levels. Chapter 3 examines talent and education in a Danish context, where the development of a comprehensive and undivided public school for all has marked education policy throughout most of the twentieth century. This vision was based on the view that talent is distributed equally throughout the population across social classes, and the cultivation of unexploited talent, especially in the lower grades, was therefore considered important. According to the Scandinavian welfare model, this was best accomplished via an education system that postponed definitive choices and ability grouping as much as possible and aimed for equality through education. The historical presentation of the approach to talent in Danish education policy ends with the new talent development philosophy currently manifested in Scandinavian countries, and it zeroes in on the talent policy in Denmark and in local, specific talent class activities.

The next step covers in-depth analysis of local talent class contexts over three chapters that broadly cover the organization, teachers, and students of the talent class case. Chapter 4 thus focuses on talent class activities in a local Danish context, especially their institutional and organizational structure. We analyse the framework and organization of talent classes in a particular public school context in Denmark. We consider the local context of setting up talent classes, the political background of the project, and the recruitment of students and teachers for the classes. We begin by outlining the relatively simple organization and division of labour behind the talent class project and then look at cooperative relations and cultures among the teachers in this project.

Chapter 5 deals with the identification and classification of the students who have participated in talent classes in the local context. It focuses on their arguments for participation and the importance of their support base. It examines how people close to the students – teachers, parents, and friends – have affected the students' decision to participate in talent activities. It also focuses on a basic understanding of who is considered talented and belonging to the target group for talent class activities and on the 'unfolding' of talent among the students in the talent classes. These focus areas serve as an approach to characterize the students in relation to social background and talent.

Chapter 6 looks at teaching in the talent classes based on different pedagogical dimensions: the practical and didactic planning and execution of the talent classes and the teaching in the classes. The analytical approach to pedagogic practices focuses especially on the significance of student codetermination and activities and includes the teachers' experiences from primary school and high school within a comparative perspective. The analysis also includes the significance of the relatively great homogeneity in the classes. Finally, the students' and teachers' reflections on their experiences from talent class are analysed in relation to their experiences of regular schooling.

Having looked at the specifics of the talent class case, we then start to shift from the local to the national level. Chapter 7 discusses views on talent development among school teachers in the local context. The empirical data include interviews with public school teachers who teach regular classes, that is, not talent classes, and

who recommended the students for the talent classes. We outline the substance in both their supportive and sceptical opinions of the talent classes and find very different views on the talent project. The teachers often refer to debates in the local media and to their students' experiences. Finally, we discuss the discourses of public school teachers with those on talent development expressed in later national policy proposals on talent at the national level.

The last analytical move explores talent as a globalized phenomenon. Chapter 8 considers findings from the Danish case and enters into dialogue with the international educational development in general and the Anglo-Saxon world in particular. The Anglo-Saxon world often serves as a source of inspiration for education systems across the world and, therefore, establishment of a perspective on the core features of this setting is very relevant. To complete an analytical full circle, the chapter also reaches back to Chaps. 2 and 3 to pick up the main themes in these chapters and connect them to a discussion on the situation and role of education research today.

Chapter 9 presents the conclusions and perspectives. We recap the questions posed in the introduction and new questions that emerged along the way. We discuss why the concept of talent is gaining ground in education policy, how talent in school is understood and practiced, alternative understandings of talent and school development that might be worth experimenting with, and possible limitations to the development of talent in contemporary Scandinavian comprehensive schools.

Overall, the fruits of this analytical journey will be the ability to show the relationship between the circulation of new ideas and normative frameworks at international level, and their transfer into national policies, while situating these developments in a socio-historical perspective. The background to support the analytical and conceptual work comes from concrete case studies with important empirical findings that demonstrate the reality and influence of this new policy in the daily work of teachers facing new challenges.

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Chapter 2
Education and Talent in an International, Conceptual History Perspective

Introduction

This chapter takes an international policy perspective in outlining the diachronic characteristics of the concept of talent since the 1960s. The focus is on the various connotations of 'talent' and the concept's interactions with education in a broad sense. The chapter draws on conceptual history in order to shed light on the relationship between concepts and policy discourses (Palonen 2002; Burke and Richter 2012). The focus is on the meanings of 'talent' and what the implications of these meanings are in terms of policy, including a brief discussion about discursive struggles with other prominent discourses in the international field of education. The empirical base of this chapter is mainly drawn from the archives of OECD in Paris and research literature about UNESCO; the key international organizations working in education in the second half of the twentieth century and continues to do so with increased intensity.

The analytical approach of this chapter is inspired by the school of conceptual history [*Begriffsgeschichte*] developed by among others the German historian Reinhart Koselleck (1923–2006). Conceptual history may be described as a branch of the linguistic turn in the social sciences in general and a branch of social history in particular (Christensen 2011; Palonen 2002; Vogelsang 2012). The main point in conceptual history is that concepts spring from social contexts. Concepts are not universal, but rather they are engraved with history, meaning that concepts and their use is indicative of the social context from which they arise. As explained by Vogelsang (2012, p. 17), concepts "(…) must first prove to be congruent with the social structure in order to gain currency. Concepts are always adapted, not just adopted." The analytical focus of conceptual history then is "(…) the temporal stratification of meaning, and the 'temporal tensions' (Koselleck) involved in the use of concepts." (Ifversen 2003, p. 64). This calls for a relational textual analysis of semantic fields, meaning that the concept under scrutiny gets its meaning from neighbouring concepts and the textual context in which it appears.

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The implication of this approach is that the concept of talent is first analysed in a synchronic perspective, looking at how it is used in different texts, including the semantic fields in which the concept occurs (Ifversen 2003, p. 61). The semantic field of a given concept is the group of concepts and words that appear in the proximity of and/or contribute meaning to the concept in question. The second analytical operation is a diachronic perspective sensitive to changes in the meaning of the concept focusing on continuities and ruptures in the use of the concept of talent over time. The chapter is structured according to the identified continuities and ruptures.

The empirical documents under investigation stem from the OECD archive in Paris as well as the Australian and Danish national archives. The OECD policy documents treated in the analysis consist of programme descriptions, reports, records, discussion papers, education committee minutes, and country reports. The material consists of 73 documents written between 1961 and 2018 and an official OECD publication from 1962 (OECD 1962) containing the conference report of the very first conference on education held by the OECD in Washington, 16th–20th October 1961, entitled 'Policy Conference on Economic Growth and Investment in Education'. The material has been selected from a database of OECD archival documents consisting of a sample of some 1908 documents on various programmes and activities in education. The search criteria in the database has been that 'talent' should occur in the document.

Selecting the OECD as the empirical basis of this chapter is founded in the observation that the OECD has gradually taken the leading role in shaping a global education space from other international organisations, like UNESCO, culminating with the launch of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000.[1] For decades, the OECD has promoted a global vision of education as a source of human capital needed to deal with social challenges and improve the economies of nation-states (Spring 2015). Today, the OECD is widely recognised as the global authority in education because of its unique role in governance by comparison and the production of educational norms and paradigms, such as educational measurement indicators (Meyer et al. 2013; Wiseman and Taylor 2017).

Talent as a National Pool of Intellectual Potential

Analysing the OECD documents about talent reveals a distinct understanding of 'talent' as being closely tied to a notion about a "pool of intellectual potential" needing to be "actively sought out and attracted into needed educational channels" for the purpose of sustaining "economic growth"; particularly in the areas of "science and technology where the need for talented individuals is expanding more

[1] Since its inception in 1961 the OECD has worked together, parallel and in competition with other key international organisations working in education like UNESCO, the world bank and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (Addey 2018; Martens and Jakobi 2010; Ydesen and Grek 2019).

rapidly than in most other sectors".[2] This understanding of talent is very clear in a quote from a 1966 Report on Curriculum Improvement and Educational Development in which it reads:

> *Societies are coming more and more to look upon their people as a reservoir of talents and skills. It is now generally accepted that these talents are far more widely distributed throughout a population than what was formerly believed and that their discovery and development is essential to the progress and improvement of all our institutions.*[3]

Right from the very beginnings of the organisation in 1961, the OECD launched project STP-18 on "The Identification and Education of Scientific Talent" under the auspices of the Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel (CSTP). To launch the project a conference entitled "Ability and Educational Opportunity in a Modern Economy" was held in Kungälv, Sweden, in June 1961. The project in general and the conference in particular indicate a clear concern with talent as something that was in risk of mismanagement. Some of the outcomes of the conference were monographs entitled 'methods and statistics on the potential supply of talent' and 'comparative case studies of wastage of talent in selective and comprehensive secondary school systems'.[4]

In a parallel but similar effort, the OECD also worked with policies for school science with a dedicated focus on "countries with special problems of basic educational development".[5] A seminar on the topic was held in Istanbul, Turkey, in the Autumn of 1961 and one of the reports presented bore the title 'Orientation of Pupils and Search for Talent and Broadening the Basis of Recruitment by Encouraging Scientific and Technical Curiosity and Knowledge among Young People.' In both these initiatives, talent was seen as something being 'out there', but it was not just any kind of talent that was sought after, it was talent in science and technical knowledge and skills. The meaning behind this notion was a strong belief in "a close relationship between the education given in schools and at higher levels and the economic and industrial development of the countries."[6] The solutions presented for finding talent was the improvement of student orientation, vocational guidance and "full information for teachers and parents on careers open to pupils."[7] In other words, the meshes of the talent dragnet were to be made finer.

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[2] OECD archive, STP/GC (61)1 (2nd.Rev.), Draft Programme for Scientific and Technical Personnel 1961–1962, Paris 29 Sep. 1961, pp. 14–16.

[3] OECD archive, STP (66)15, Report on Curriculum Improvement and Educational Development, Paris 16 Sep. 1966, p. 10

[4] OECD archive, STP/GC(61)1 (2nd.Rev.), Draft Programme for Scientific and Technical Personnel 1961–1962, Paris 29 Sep. 1961, p. 15; Danish National Archive, Ministry of Education, International Office, 1959–1970 cases concerning International Organizations, OE 21963–41,963, Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel, The Study Group in the Economics of Education, Progress Report and Programme of Work, dated January 5th, 1963, p. 7f.

[5] OECD archive, STP/GC(61)4, Governing Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel, Seminar on Policy for School Science, Paris 20 Jan. 1961, p. 3

[6] Ibid. p. 2

[7] Danish National Archive, Ministry of Education, International Office, 1959–1970, Cases Concerning International Organizations, archival unit OE 40 1960 – 1 4 1963, letter no. 2542-41,

This line of thinking is rooted in what Joel Spring (2015) has termed 'the economization of education' meaning that education is viewed as an economic production factor in general and as a tool for maximizing the outcomes of the available human resources in particular. Interestingly, we here see the foundation of one of the much later core claims of PISA about a causality between PISA-scores and economic growth. There is however now a substantial literature rejecting this claim (Auld and Morris 2016).

In the aforementioned 1966 Report on Curriculum Improvement and Educational Development, the link between talent and production becomes very clear:

> *We believe that every modern society rests upon a basis of competence which can be produced only through education. To produce such a level of competence, the educational system must be so organised as to discover and develop the individual talent latent in society and to guide such talent along productive lines.*[8]

A major concern for the OECD was, however, the reproduction of social structures hampering the full use of talent in society. In the same report, the CSTP – after 1970, the Education Committee – interestingly pointed to the detrimental effects of examinations and tests when it came to overcoming talent barriers and argued against premature decisions on career paths:

> *Education is a sorting-out process and competition can be stimulating and constructive. Yet tests and examinations have been used frequently to stop the education of students rather than as a mean to discover and encourage their distinctive qualities. Too often examinations, like mass gladiatorial combats, have been used as a device whereby students destroy each other in pointless competition. The schools must provide more channels and fewer barriers to talent. Efforts to help the student find his potential capacity should begin in the period of basic education, but factors governing career decisions are too complex to be final at such an early stage.*[9]

Thus, the conceptual understanding of talent in this period seems to revolve around talent as a more or less fixed entity latently present in societies. The purpose of education then is to discover the talented and build their competences for the sake of economic growth. This notion about a more or less fixed talent pool is among other places visible in the conference report from the 1961 policy conference on 'Economic Growth and Investment in Education' in which it reads "In almost all European countries the reservoir of untapped talent is much larger than in the United States." (OECD 1962, p. 34).

But the concept of talent had a global component too. In his address to the conference, Philip H. Coombs, assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs, head of the US delegation and chairman of the conference, emphasized (ibid. 27):

2nd department, 3rd office, OECD report 'Seminar on Policy for School Science', 13 June 1962, p. 13

[8] OECD archive, STP (66)15, Report on Curriculum Improvement and Educational Development, Paris 16 Sep. 1966, p. 10f.

[9] Ibid. p. 13

> *(…) the demand for highly specialized manpower, especially in the sciences and engineering but elsewhere as well, will rise with the greatest speed, and shortages of high talent will spread from one field to another rather unpredictably. Increasingly the market for high talent will become internationalized.*

The quote indicates that Coombs envisioned a globalized economic system where nations struggle to attract scarce talent in order to sustain their economic growths on market terms. Nations therefore needed to improve education planning and the organisation of their education systems in order to maximize both the attraction and extraction of talent. Such an objective required more channels and fewer barriers from both outside-in and bottom-up directions.

In this section, we have seen a relatively static concept of talent being closely associated with a notion of a pool of natural science talent in every society needing to go through refinement in the education system in order to improve economic growth. To sustain this goal, nations in general and education systems in particular needed to be able to identify, cultivate and attract the talented. This understanding of talent is very clear in the 1960s until at least 1968 when the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) began its operations (Papadopoulos 1994).[10] While the founding of CERI meant that education got a stronger independent status and focus within the OECD organization, it also meant more resources for education research which may explain why it makes sense to speak of a rupture in the concept of talent around 1970.

A Dynamic Configuration of the Concept of Talent

While the concept of talent within the ranks of the OECD remained very closely linked with an economically utilitarian perspective on education (cf. Chap. 3), the documents reveal that the concept also moved into a more dynamic configuration where talent was not necessarily seen as static as was the case earlier. In the CSTP work programme, talent was seen as something that could be developed:

> *(…) the main concern of the discussions will focus on the important policy issues confronting member countries in the utilisation of highly qualified personnel, with particular reference to the problems posed by the need to forge closer relationships between industry and the various sectors of economic activity on the one hand and education on the other for the development of talent.*[11]

Arguably, the static 'talent pool' conception still played a role, but is seems to be increasingly linked with notions and calls for increased social mobility. In their

[10] It should be duly mentioned that education had been of the agenda of the OECD's predecessor, the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), culminating with the establishment of the Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel (CSTP) and the Office for Scientific and Technical Personnel in 1958 (Bürgi 2017)

[11] OECD archive, STP (69)7, Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel, Programme of Work for 1970, 3 Jul. 1969

analysis of the supply and demand for teachers, the CSTP made an interesting inverted-comma-reference to the static concept of talent and links it with a broader class-based observation about moving beyond teachers' traditional social class:

> *In view of the problems raised by the increasing demand for teachers the question might be raised as to the possibility of the existence of "reserves of talent" in certain groups of the community. The proportion of secondary school teachers already coming from the top socio-economic ups would be difficult to increase in the future.*[12]

In a confidential OECD working paper written by the famous education comparativist George F.Z. Bereday (1920–1983), the link between talent and social mobility becomes very clear:

> *The central problem in technological societies, which are notoriously starved for talent, is not what proportion university seats is reserved to working class sons, but how to make all talent, wherever it can be found, available in society's managerial positions. Our first care must be to ensure minimum frustration for talent flowing from lower reaches of society and minimum displacement of talent found in upper reaches.*[13]

The OECD now called for the member states to design education systems much more dynamically in order to accommodate recurrent education, lifelong learning and the avoidance of irrevocable decisions on life trajectories and career paths (Rubenson 2006, 2009). There were distinct concerns about social mobility and social justice, although still with a distinctly economic purpose. In their 1977 review of education policies, the Education Committee stated that: *The belief is nearly universal in OECD Member countries that every young person regardless of sex, social status, financial means or race, should have the right to receive an education commensurate with his natural talents and legitimate aspirations.*[14]

The statement is clearly echoed in the Education Committee's musings on 'Recent Developments and Future Options' in October of that year:

> *If at present the screening and filtering of credentials takes place mainly at initial entry to work which thereafter defines rigid tracks and careers which people have to follow, the alternation of work and education throughout the life cycle could seriously alter this picture. For the individual, he would no longer be bound by seemingly insurmountable barriers based on his initial success in the school system. His talents, capabilities and competencies would be given a much fairer chance of fulfilment at work. From a wider perspective, alternation as a common experience could well mean that the phenomenon of training "echoing" existing educational advantages would be markedly reduced.*[15]

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[12] OECD archive, STP (69)11, Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel, Study on the Supply and Demand for Teachers in Primary and Secondary Education, 17 Nov. 1969, p. 182.

[13] OECD archive, Confidential working paper, Directorate for Scientific Affairs, Innovation in Higher Education - Towards a Mass University, 19 Jan. 1973, p. 44.

[14] OECD archive, ED(77)1, Education Committee, Review of Policies for Basic Education, 25 Apr. 1977, p. 1

[15] OECD archive, ED(77)14, Education Committee, Governing Board of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, Recurrent Education - Recent Developments and Future Options, 25 Oct. 1977, p. 21

One year later, the CERI considered embarking upon a project on education and the exceptional child including "Gifted and Talented Children in Rural Areas"[16] The call was for a wider and more dynamic concept of talent able to spot and work with different sets of talent and criticism was raised that "(…) current practices are often based on a rather narrow definition of talent and achievement and tend to be critically viewed by many outside groups with very different interests and ideas."[17] At a seminar entitled 'Education, Urban development and local initiatives' held in Venice in April 1980, the CERI provided an analytical contribution in which it reads "Rather less deprived youngsters also frequently need and would like to develop themselves and their talents in joint school-extra school activities."[18]

It is, however, still rather unclear whether talent is something possessed by the individual or something that can be developed, but the broadening of the concept compared to the first period as well as the concern for social mobility is unmistakable. This observation falls in line with Joel Spring's broader findings on the OECD taking a path of focussing on socio-economic goals. Concerning the 1970s, Spring (2015, p. 39) argues that the OECD "(…) shifted its emphasis on education and economic growth to education as part of social service, which eventually included early childhood education, services to families, assimilation of foreign workers, support for women's rights, environmental education, and lifelong learning."

In terms of the concept of talent, the OECD education committee were themselves aware of the conceptual ambiguity. In a discussion about nature or nurture in education, the education committee listed a complex of issues, among others "The extent to which individual talent is viewed as the principal determinant of that person's ability to acquire this cognitive knowledge and skills or whether factors such as motivation and culture play a significant role." And "the extent to which this individual capacity or talent is hereditary or whether it is importantly shaped by the environment".[19] The issues remained unresolved at the time, but it is noteworthy that they came on the agenda. The driving force was an urge to have a deeper understanding of how to deal with talent in education. In the 1980 CERI country survey of Australia it was noted that:

> *Talented children are recognised as needing special attention if their ability is to be developed to its full extent. Policy for the education of talented children has for some time now asserted that talented children and other children will gain most if the talented are taught in mainstream classes. This attitude was a reaction to earlier attitudes which had favoured the intellectually gifted child and which in the early 1950s were considered elitist and narrow in relation to the remainder of the school population. There is now, in turn, a trend*

[16] OECD archive, CERI/CD (78)14, Basic Education in Sparsely-Populated Areas (SPA), 20 Sep. 1978, p. 57

[17] OECD archive, ED(80)9, Education Committee, Governing Board of CERI, Review of OECD Educational Activities, Summary of past work, 7th May 1980, p. 15

[18] OECD archive, CERI/ELD/80.03, Education, Urban development and local initiatives, 21st March 1980, p. 13.

[19] OECD archive, ED(81)13, Educational Equality and Social justice, a preliminary statement of issues and suggestions for future work, 3rd November 1981, p. 13.

towards concern for these children and some attention is being given to means of encouraging full development.[20]

The concept of talent prevalent in the OECD in this period can perhaps best be summed up as being in close accordance with British sociologist Michael Young's controversial book 'The Rise of the Meritocracy' first published in 1958, but without any of the negative connotations that Young intended. Analysing the documents gives reason to speak of another rupture in the concept of talent in the early 1980s which saw the publication of the American 'A Nation at Risk' report; a seminal education reform report from the Reagan administration's National Commission on Excellence in Education warning of the deteriorating state of American education (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983). The report was the cause of the OECD stepping up its work determinately to develop international comparative education indicators, which lead to the launch of the International Indicators of Educational Systems (INES) project in 1988 (Grek and Ydesen 2021; Martens and Jakobi 2010; Martens and Wolf 2006).[21]

A Diversified and Labour-Market Oriented Concept of Talent

In the 1980s, the OECD had to respond to member states' concerns about growing youth unemployment; a defining feature of the 1980s' economic situation (Papadopoulos 1994). In terms of talent in education, the poor labour market conditions led to a seemingly paradoxical situation. Young people experienced decreased return of investment on education while at the same time greater numbers of students remained in the education system. In the report from a meeting of the education committee at the ministerial level in November 1984 the impact of the situation on education is clearly reflected:

Particularly with the unprecedented high levels of unemployment among young people, more of the young remain in education who before would have left to take a job. Schools, colleges and training centres have thus to accommodate a wide diversity of student talents, interests and backgrounds while attempting to discharge the onerous responsibility of giving each young person a preparation for adult life to the maximum of his or her capabilities.[22]

Zooming in on the concept of talent, the greater level of diversity in education seems to be accompanied by a broader recognition of talent: *At the post-compulsory level, the sheer breadth of talent and motivations of the student body is necessitating*

[20] OECD archive, CERI/SF/80.01 Financing, Organisation and Governance of Education for Special Populations, Country Surveys of Current Practice: Australia, 1 September 1980, p. 16.

[21] The OECD began work on developing comparative data for the OECD countries in the early 1960s (Bürgi 2016, 2017; Ydesen and Grek 2019).

[22] OECD archive, ED/Min (84)2, Education in Changing Social, Economic and Technological Conditions, s. 119

radical re-thinking of this sector in order that those who wish to continue their studies in higher education and those who enter the post-school world immediately can be equally catered for.[23]

The same broad recognition of the talents of different demographic and social groups is in evidence some 7 years later when the education committee published its report on 'High Quality Education and Training for All': *The student population has a wider coverage as larger proportions of infants, teenagers, and young and older adults come within education's responsibility. There is a concomitant spreading of talent background, and clienteles among pupils and students*.[24]

In a historical contextual perspective, the broader concept of talent of the 1980s associated with different demographic groups must also be viewed as a corollary of the lifelong learning agendas pursued by among others UNESCO, the European Commission and the OECD since the 1970s (Elfert 2015).[25] But given the high unemployment rates being the key concern of politicians in many OECD member countries, increased attention was given to the parts of the population with a 'tenuous foothold in the labour market'; often referred to as 'the lost cohort'.[26] Being an economic organisation, the OECD took a special interest in the labour market context and the achievement of successful pairing between labour market needs and the talent forms available among different demographic and social groups: "*Their [i.e. the generation of young adults who were leaving education for the labour market during the late 1970s and 1980s when the youth employment problem was at its worst] learning and training needs are of particular importance if countries are to make full use of all the talents and experiences at their disposal.*"[27]

In this respect the dominant use of the talent concept was highly contextual but continued to be framed in a very economic sense. This observation is very evident in the minutes of a meeting in the Education Committee at ministerial level in 1989: *Insufficient use by a country of its potential talent and skills in the intensely competitive world of the late twentieth century means to lose a vital edge.*[28]

But the quote also indicates the continued existence of the older notion of talent being associated with a talent pool, although the idea now was that there were multiple pools of talent in each nation: *Education "for all" implies priority for the educationally under-served: To extend the benefits of education to all makes*

[23] Ibid. p. 122.

[24] OECD archive, ED (90)10, Education Committee, Extended Bureau, High Quality Education and Training for All, Draft Analytical Report, dated July 18, 1990, p. 23.

[25] See e.g. OECD archive, ED/Min (90)5/21 Meeting of the Education Committee at Ministerial Level, Item 4, National Statement Japan 'Toward a Lifelong Learning Society', 9 November 1990.

[26] OECD archive, ED (88)16, Education Committee, Medium-term Priorities, 19 October 1988, p. 8.

[27] OECD archive, EC (90)10, Education Committee, Extended Bureau, High Quality Education and Training for All, Draft Analytical Report, 12 July 1990, p.10.

[28] OECD archive, ED (89)15, Education Committee, Meeting of the Committee at Ministerial Level, 3 November 1989, p. 6.

economic sense as much as it accords with social and educational equity; countries cannot afford to leave large pools of talent untapped.[29]

The diversified labour-market orientation of the talent concept again meant a very utilitarian perspective on talent. Whereas the OECD since its inception had pursued an economistic and utilitarian agenda in terms of education, there was always a clear recognition within the organisation that education served other purposes than merely the provision of workers for the labour market (Elfert and Ydesen 2020). Now, the understanding in the CERI governing board was that: *Industrialists and the economic policy-makers were now emphasizing the need for a high quality, basic education which would give all youngsters the basic skills to adapt to a changing economic environment. And educators increasingly accepted that personal development cannot be divorced from the real world opportunities to put talent into practice.*[30] The shift was echoed in the comprehensive work of the OECD Indicators of Education Statistics (INES) programme established in the late 1980s to explore and develop comparable education indicators. In this sense, the INES programme served as a precursor of PISA (Grek and Ydesen 2021). In a paper by Her Majesty's Inspector, Alan Gibson, presented in a special session on the development of educational indicators at the American Educational Research Association meeting in Boston in April 1990, the burgeoning shift is summed up in a series of concluding questions:

> *Does the debate over education indicators simply reflect a sea change in what is deemed to count as quality in education? Is the prime criterion of educational success shifting from that of emancipator of individual talent to generator of economic prosperity? Does the wide interest in education indicators offer a clear signal that human capital formation has finally eclipsed personal enrichment as the principal motivator of educational activity in each nation?*[31]

Talent was now something that should be used on the labour market and not something to be developed for the personal growth of the individual or for the sake of academic or artistic achievement. In retrospect we might here see one of the core building blocks of the twenty-first century skills agenda which has become so powerful in recent years (Ananiadou and Claro 2009; Spring 2015). Talent came to be seen as something diversified but still something that could be incorporated into indicators and thus measured in relation to labour market demands. But the liberal capitalist meaning-making of the OECD-world soon had to face a fundamentally new situation caused by the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the cold war. This situation created a new environment for the concept of talent. In 1998 the OECD founded the Centre for Co-operation with Non-Members (CCNM). The CCNM was the preliminary culmination on a new trend within the OECD organisation focusing

[29] Australian National Archives, Canberra, A1642, C1990/12479, OECD Education Committee meeting at ministerial level, revised draft communique, 31 July 1990, p. 5

[30] OECD archive, CERI/CD/M (86)2, Governing Board, Summary Record of the 35th Session, 27–28 November, 13 February 1987, p. 13.

[31] OECD archive, CERI/INES/CoG/90.04, Project on International Educational Indicators, Educational Indicators at the 1990 AERA, 17 September 1990, p. 12.

explicitly on non-member states beginning its nascent imprints in 1992 with a focus on so-called 'economies in transition' after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.[32]

Exporting a Concept of Talent as a Signifier of a Global and Moving Talent Pool

The end of the cold war led many Western organisations and countries to unleash the values and economic models of the liberal capitalist democracies. The OECD was no exception. One might call this new Western influence 'educating desire' among the former Eastern bloc and developing countries, meaning that the same types of economic growth and social welfare programmes enjoyed in the West came to function as ideological carrots to strive for. It was felt that the Western model should be the yardstick against which progress and modernisation was to be measured and the OECD was a central player in that process.

This is very clearly visible in the documents about talent. In 2003, the CCNM published a report on education activities in so-called 'non-member economies' emphasizing the link between talent with economic demands: "*Education is widely regarded as a powerful force in building the new Russia: helping its citizens meet the challenges of the new, emerging democratic society; developing in its labour force the talents, skills and dispositions required in the new economic and social setting.*"[33]

The OECD positioned itself as an organisation with the right tools and solutions for 'new economies' to get on the Western path of development and prosperity. Education was a central building block in that respect and participation in the international large-scale assessment programs such as PISA and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) was presented as the guarantee for being on the right track in the global competition race and in terms of education quality assurance:

> *Moving forward, China may wish to explore country-wide participation in PISA 2018 and expand representation in future rounds of TALIS. Deeper engagement in the OECD Education 2030 project could also allow China to join the global discussion on curriculum design and innovative pedagogies. The OECD Enhancing Higher Education System Performance project is another area where China may be interested in engaging with the OECD as it seeks to further develop its talent base.* (OECD 2017, p. 38)

In 2008, the OECD launched the Initiative on Employment and Skills Strategies in Southeast Asia (ESSSA) jointly conducted with *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)*, the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

[32] OECD archive, CCNM/EDU/RD (2003)1, OECD Education Activities in Non-Member Economies, Paris 27 March 2003, p. 2

[33] OECD archive, CCNM/EDU/RD (2003)1, OECD Education Activities in Non-Member Economies, 27 March 2003, p. 9

and ASEAN (Martinez-Fernandez and Powell 2010). The initiative seeks to strengthen government capacities in implementing effective local employment and skills development strategies. In October 2017, the annual meeting of the initiative meeting was hosted in Hanoi, Vietnam with a focus on "Building Talent for the Next Production Revolution" (OECD 2017, p. 48). The connection between talent and the economy is unmistakable but at this point it is coupled with an orientation towards the future accompanied with the promise of a 'production revolution'. Talent is again something that can be attracted and extracted. As we saw was the case in the 1960s, the cultivation of talent requires more channels and fewer barriers from both outside-in and bottom-up directions. The pursuit of this objective comes to the fore in the 2016 OECD education policy recommendation catalogue to China. Here the OECD calls for a reduced role of standardized testing and the reformation of the traditional Chinese entrance examination, the *gaokao*. The sixth recommendation is to "(…) establish a graduate programme entrance exam that can select innovative talents and can sufficiently test proficiency in high-level applied science." (OECD 2016, p. 31). Again, the comparison with the 1960s concept of talent seems to be valid because talent is understood in terms of science and technical knowledge and skills.

But while the concept of talent in 1960 seemed rather bound to national frameworks the 'talent pool' was very much seen in a global and transnational perspective in the 'age of globalization' (Amin and Foster 2014): "*Migration of talent now plays an important role in shaping skilled labour forces throughout the OECD area*" (OECD 2008, p. 9). The focus was very much on the mobility of talent and how nations' can best accommodate and attract moving talent understood as first line contributors to economic growth.

Concluding Discussion: The Talent Agenda in a Global Perspective

The concept of talent emerging from the conceptual history analysis of the OECD documents in this chapter demonstrates both significant continuities and ruptures. The recurring ingredient of the talent concept cutting across – or underlying – the pattern identified in this chapter is unequivocally the connection between the economy (i.e. concerns about growth and the workings of the labour market) and education in general and the notion of talent in particular.

This observation fits well with the argument of several historians of education that the OECD has long promoted a global vision of education as a source of human capital needed to deal with social challenges and improve the economies of nation-states (Bürgi 2016; Tröhler 2014).

In the documents, talent has often been portrayed almost like a production factor along capital, technology, and land. It is a scant resource that can be extracted from the education system. Therefore, the focus has often been on optimizing education

systems and keeping them accountable for the delivery of talent. The other source of talent is the global labour market where nations compete with other nations in attracting the best talents.

In terms of ruptures, the concept of talent has shifted from a relatively static concept of talent being closely associated with a notion of a pool of natural science talent in every society needing to go through refinement in the education system in order to improve economic growth to a more dynamic concepts rooted in a notion about meritocracy. Now, talent could be cultivated and developed across the lifespan of citizens which was reflected in the idea about lifelong learning. In the 1970s and into the 1980s the concept of talent became more inclusive in terms of mobilizing broader human resources associated with different demographic and social groups. The understanding of talent also seems to fit the political challenges experienced by many OECD member states, such as high unemployment rates.

The concept of talent as it is in evidence in the most recent OECD documents fits well with what Michaels et al. (2001) have called 'The War for Talent'. But as pointed out by Brown and Tannock (2009), the concept of 'talent' is frequently left vague and undefined (…). This is also the case in the OECD documents, although it is implied that talent in this period has do to with the frontline workers of economic growth as we have pointed out. In this respect, Brown & Tannock emphasize an ideological component of the war for talent along neoliberal lines arguing that the notion of a global talent elite working in e.g. computer science, engineering, banking, "(…) encourages rising income inequalities, and challenges the linear relationship between 'learning' and 'earning' (human capital)." (Ibid. p. 377). This ideological component is also visible in the way Western organisation like the OECD and nation-states sought to disseminate cultural values revolving around liberal, capitalist, and democratic modes of globalization to the rest of the world.

Taking a broader look at the international field of education in the period covered here, it is clear that other agendas promoted by other international organisations, like UNESCO and the World Bank, may have influenced the way the OECD reflected the concept of talent in education. This especially holds true when we construe the field of international organisations as characterised by interplay, struggles, organisational overlaps, and mutual dependencies between these organisations (Ydesen and Grek 2019).

Some other significant educational agendas in this period – not previously mentioned in this chapter – are education in developing countries promoted by the World Bank, UNESCO and the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (Giton 2016; Heyneman 2003; Ydesen and Verschaeve 2019), education for the promotion of peace promoted by UNESCO (Kulnazarova and Ydesen 2016), and inclusive education promoted by UNESCO with the 1994 Salamanca-statement (UNESCO 1994). The Salamanca Statement is rooted in a development that started a little more than 10 years earlier when a World Health Organization expert group decided to define rehabilitation of the disabled as a combined and coordinated use of medicinal, social, educational and work-related initiatives to train each disabled person to reach their highest possible functional level.

As we have seen is the case with the OECD, these agendas are rooted in the worldview and purpose of the organisations as well as the agendas of their membership base. To a large extent, the World Bank has operated within the same paradigm as the OECD with economic concerns and human capital theory taking centre stage (Elfert 2016). UNESCO on the other hand has struggled to unite a very unruly membership base while upholding a very universal approach to education rooted in a human rights perspective on education and a notion of education as holding an intrinsic value conducive to democracy and the promotion of inter-human understanding (Duedahl 2016; Elfert and Ydesen 2020).

As such, the shift in the 1970s and 1980s towards more socio-economic factors, social mobility and consideration of less privileged groups related to education in general and the perception of talent in particular seem to have found fertile soil from a broader composition of international agendas than what the conceptual history analysis indicates. In many ways, this observation is epitomized in the Salamanca-statement (UNESCO 1994, p. 6):

> *(…) schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.*

According to this agenda, if we take giftedness as equivalent to talent, it is presented as a quality that may represent a challenge to teachers and perhaps in special cases be difficult to accommodate within the regular school for all. *The specially gifted* are placed in a category with disabled as a special group of children that schools have to accommodate.

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Chapter 3
Talent and Educational Differentiation in Denmark

Introduction

In this chapter, we examine talent and education in Denmark, where the development of a comprehensive and undivided public school for all has marked the education policy throughout most of the twentieth century (De Coninck-Smith et al. 2013). We analyse the educational visions behind the Scandinavian welfare model, which has emphasized an undivided school that postponed selection and definitive choices as much as possible and aimed for equality through education. Following the historical analysis, we analyse how and why talent has re-entered the education political agenda in Scandinavia and in Denmark specifically, and what the visions are behind the 'new' talent agenda.

From a sociological perspective, such analyses contribute to our understanding of power distributions in the field of education; i.e. mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. But they also serve as analytical entries to understand the very workings of the state because the handling of who is deemed as talented and who is deemed as untalented signals the way that the state is enacted – or even crafted – and the societal values present in that process (Bourdieu 1984; Woolford and Curran 2013; Ydesen 2016).

The first part of the chapter presents a brief historical overview of the changing discourses on talent and school in the Danish education system. According to Steinmetz (2011, p. 46) Bourdieu emphasizes that every social object must be understood as historical and that it is imperative to historicize the research object in question in order to achieve understanding (see also Øland and Ydesen 2015).

The next part analyses the contemporary agenda on talent management in Danish education and is followed up by an analysis of the transfer, translation and transformation of the national talent policies in the municipal context. This is where the talent class project that obtained funding from the national talent fund was developed and carried out. The processes linked to this involved political disputes and

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controversies about the school and the role of education in society playing out in the local municipal context.

Discourses on Talent in the Heyday of the Welfare State

During the twentieth century, the public school system in Denmark gradually developed into an undivided comprehensive school. This development started formally with the 1958 school act, which launched a long-term trend in education policy with gradual and continuous elimination of streaming as a main theme. The 1958 act eliminated streaming of students from 5th to 7th grade and equalized urban and rural schools to give all children 'a real chance' to advance in the school system (Kruchov 1984, p. 146). During the following decades, legislation as well as profound societal changes caused radical changes in the public school system.

Economic and political factors determined what was possible in practice. The 1960s were characterized by prosperity and rising employment, and at the entrance to the 1970s, there was virtually full employment. The ambition was "equality through education" (Hansen 2003, p. 101) and the search was on for "intelligence reserves" (Olsen 1986, p. 83; Hansen 2003) or "talent reserves" (Husén 1974). As pointed out by Swedish educational scholar Torsten Husén (1968, p. 19), the educational system would have to cultivate unexploited talent from all, including the lower, societal strata more efficiently. According to Husén, this would require a flexible educational system in which the definitive choice between different educational streams was postponed as long as possible rather than a system with early selection, which was largely dependent on social background.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the search for talent in the education system was strongly championed by the OECD. But the notion of cultivating talent via the education system reached even further back in time. Originally, it connected closely with a political ambition to muster the resources of so-called 'backward children'. Such an ambition is clearly visible in this 1920 quotation from remedial schoolteacher, Anna Vilsbæk: 'We must do all we can to make the children of the remedial school useful for society in time' (Vilsbæk 1920, p. 323f.).[1] The quotation points to the existence of a utilitarian perspective on education in Denmark and a desire to make use of all available human resources.

In a 1919 lecture addressed to *Pædagogisk Selskab* [the Pedagogical Society] by Denmark's first professor of psychology Alfred Lehmann (1858–1921), we find the same utilitarian perspective on education:

> *If a person is placed in a position where he does not belong, he can cause irreparable damage, and at the same time society has missed out on him in another position where he might have been very useful. Therefore, all countries have attempted to place everyone in their right place.* (Lehmann 1919, p. 68)

[1] All English translations of research literature and primary sources in Danish are made by the authors unless otherwise stated.

As argued by Ydesen (2011) the Lehmann quote might be viewed in light of a declining birth rate and the need to make the best use of the available human resources. This decline was rooted in the transition from a farming society to an industrialised society in which having many children was not considered an advantage. The utilitarian perspective can be interpreted in light of "(…) a post-World War I spirit of international competition in which Denmark found itself during the interwar years." (p. 51).

In October 1945, the Danish government formed a commission under the leadership of Professor Hal Koch (1904–1963), tasked with addressing the special problems and needs of youth. Until 1952, this commission drafted no fewer than 26 reports on aspects pertaining to youth and society. One area of focus was the cultivation of the intelligence reserve. The commission had estimated that 10–20% of a birth cohort possessed an IQ greater than 115, which was regarded as a prerequisite for completing a higher secondary level education (Juul 2006, p. 74). Since fewer than 5% of a birth cohort completed higher secondary education (A-levels) in the 1940s, a political demand arose to remedy this discrepancy (Ydesen 2011). An important factor behind this demand was the political connection established between education and economic growth (see Chap. 2). A rise in education levels was recognised as a prerequisite for continued economic growth.

Away from Streaming

Following visions of the welfare state, the comprehensive school developed in parallel with other democratization initiatives in society. The underlying ideology of equality was widely labelled as a social democratic approach, but it could just as well have been a product of the general democratic development, and some did see it as liberal (Olsen 1986, p. 85). However, the Social Democrats and left-wing parties were the primary exponents of this ideology.

The school act of 1975 introduced the "almost" comprehensive 10-year school. The act preserved streaming in two courses of different content, called basic course and expanded course within four subjects. It was passed by a broad majority of the Social Democrats, the Liberal Party, the Social Liberals, the Socialist People's Party, and the Christian People's Party. The compromise on streaming allowed the Liberal Party's streaming to be adopted as the ordinary arrangement, and the Social Democrats' non-streaming as a local option. The intention was to allow the comprehensive school to gradually become the norm. The arrangement only applied to 8th and 9th grade, but it was an important first step (Kruchov 1984, p. 151).

In the following years, more and more schools abandoned streaming in one or more of the four subjects; not necessarily in a deliberate quest for a comprehensive school, but also based on an assessment of quality in teaching. Moreover, more students than expected chose the expanded course. The result was very small classes in the basic course and so much diversity in student abilities in the expanded course that the classes were de facto comprehensive. Many schools thus found it expedient

to abandon streaming altogether, and in reality, the student trends determined the structure (Olsen 1986, p. 89).

In subsequent years economic crisis politics dominated. From the late 1970s and with increasing force in the first half of the 1980s, the Western countries struggled with imbalances of the economy (see Chap. 2). Unemployment reached interwar levels, and rising public expenses were considered a main problem. The nation state faced unprecedented challenges from globalization and increasing international competition, and the public sector was strongly criticized for being ineffective and for fostering a culture of dependence. The response was a neoliberal turn on the shape of deregulation, which meant fewer rules dictated from the central administration, but more goal-oriented management and thus a clarification of the school's objectives (Telhaug et al. 2002, pp. 92–93).

Under the extended municipal autonomy, expenditure for the primary school had been rising until the 1980s, but this was followed by a series of austerity measures from the Ministry of Education. Increased state control of the entire public sector's economy was introduced with cutbacks as the main economic-political tool. The introduction of tax ceilings, expenditure frameworks and cuts in block grants would force the municipalities to lower the service level. The cutbacks were followed up by a reorganization and privatization plan that legitimized further savings. After 1983, the municipalities saved more than could be explained by a declining birth rate, and enrolment in private schools increased drastically in this period (Windinge 1985).

The 1993 Primary Education Act was implemented in the context of a long economic recession. In the years prior to the implementation, the political consensus on social equalization and economic growth as each other's prerequisite and the social role of the school had evaporated. The comprehensive school with the class as the basic unit was one point of contention, and the unifying compromise was found in the principle of differentiated teaching. According to this principle, the students' different abilities, potentials, needs and motives would be included to support individual and common goals for teaching, which according to § 1 "must be planned in relation to the individual student's abilities and needs." The principle of differentiated teaching, which rested on the belief in possibilities in the community, was one reason the 1993 act was called "the school for all" (Nielsen 2006, p. 33).

The aim mentioned in the Salamanca Declaration of providing adequate challenges *for all* students had, in principle, been adopted in the Danish primary school's requirement of differentiated teaching. The principle of differentiated teaching was legally implemented with the Primary Education Act of 1993, which states that teaching must "be varied to correspond to the individual student's needs and abilities" and thus "contain challenges to all students" (18, § 1–2). With the 1993 Act, the last remnant of streaming in primary schools disappeared, and a gradual process in the twentieth century towards a comprehensive school was completed.

The following years were characterized by increasing globalization and neoliberal reform. In the education policy agenda, this meant a focus on the individual and human capital. Focus moved from the community to the individual's personal development. With reference to human capital and the PISA reports, a comprehensive

evaluation wave was launched to control that the schools complied with the academic goals and that the children acquired sufficient subject knowledge. With the increased focus on academic competences, milestones for primary school subjects were formulated, and it became important to achieve a high score compared to other countries in International Large-Scale Assessments (Ministry of Education 2002). These factors contributed to the implementation and contents of the 2006 primary education act.

The basic premise for all other changes was the new preamble for the primary school. It toned down the democratic and personal *Bildung* and defined the school's foremost task as disseminating knowledge and skills (Hermann 2007). The recommended learning objectives were changed into obligatory intermediate and end goals in the form of binding learning goals for the students' proficiency at specific stages. Teachers' and students' collaboration on the content of the teaching would thus have to focus on reaching the centrally defined goals, which implied a reduction of the teachers' free choice of method and an individualization of the students.

New Ways of Differentiation

The 2006 act reintroduced the option of streaming across classes throughout the school process, although only for limited periods. Collective teaching was still the norm, but student differentiation based on gender or academic level now became an option. It was thus possible, in parallel to the principle of differentiated teaching, to gather students with special needs in classes within the framework of general education, when this was deemed practically and pedagogically justified (Nielsen 2006, p. 36). However, the 2006 act still emphasized the principle of differentiated teaching, but despite many years as a fundamental principle, it proved difficult to carry out in practice.

In an evaluation of differentiated teaching at eight schools (EVA 2004), teachers and leaders mentioned teamwork and flexible planning as factors that especially promote differentiated teaching and insufficient resources as barriers. This includes resources or factors like more group or workshop rooms, more computers and dual teacher arrangements – all of which demand more resources for the primary schools. In addition, the teachers would like more time for activities like pedagogic discussions, common planning and student dialogues (EVA 2004, p. 71). They pointed to a general lack of resources, which was claimed to obstruct differentiated teaching. The question is, however, whether teachers make it possible to differentiate teaching and avoid streaming or if they have simply found new ways to divide the students. Streaming seems to be increasingly inspired by American theories of learning styles and multiple intelligences or tests of academic skills, which amounts to a reintroduction of streaming (Olsen 2004; Nielsen 2006b).

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (2002) has allegedly inspired a new form of differentiation. It encourages teachers to sort students in a class based on their predominant type of "intelligence". This is an attempt to recognize and clarify

the multitude of opportunities available to students and seems to be a positive point of departure. However, a categorization based on such criteria requires testing of the students and overlooks that not all potentials are equally valued in society. But the risk in allowing the students to concentrate on practicing specific forms of potentials is that these students are socially side-tracked early in life. Even though Gardner's theory represents a "softer approach" to IQ testing students, it is part of a growing tendency to IQ test and describe children in school, and focus is currently on highly intelligent children (Bendixen 2009).

Differentiation and focus on children with special gifts like intelligence or talent also reflects an individualization trend. As outlined in the historical review, the act on differentiated teaching was implemented as streaming was abolished. As a result, the span of student abilities within one class might grow, which in principle increases the demand for differentiated teaching.

The current focus on talent and excellence could be seen as an education policy countermeasure to a historical orientation towards equality where the concept of talent seemingly played a completely different role. In the contemporary discourse, talent primarily points in the direction of increased individualization coupled with economic growth. This coupling is not necessarily logical, since there are no indications that the focus on and development of a strong comprehensive school culture in the Scandinavian culture has reduced these countries' international competitiveness. In contrast, comparisons with countries with selective and divided school systems document that the former countries are characterized by social equality and cohesiveness (Green et al. 2006; Wiborg 2009), which can in fact be very conducive to economic growth.

The Talent Agenda Under the Reign of the Neoliberal Competition State

Since the turn of the millennium, changing ministers of education have put talent on the political agenda. At the annual Sorø Meeting[2] in 2004, then minister of education in Denmark, Ulla Tørnæs, expressed her belief that plenty of talent has been hushed up in the Danish primary schools and raised the question whether it is not up to the school system to create stars. Addressing the school system, she asked: "How do we make sure that potentials in special talents are exploited?"

The following years, talent manifested itself on the education policy agenda via the following initiatives:

- 2005: Talent Camp 05
- 2006–2007: Talent fund of DKK 10 million
- 2008: Talent report to the parliament

[2]Yearly meeting where politicians, practioners and researchers gather to discuss the Danish public school system.

- 2009: Establishment of the Maersk Science Centre for Talent Development
- 2010: Working group on talent established, report published in April 2011

Talent Camp 05 was a 48-h "innovation camp" organized by the Ministry of Education to gather ideas for better talent management in Danish education. The participants were representatives from different educational institutions, research, businesses and sports. After the 48-h camp, a working group was formed to look at project proposals and discuss their implementation.

The Ministry of Education's Talent Camp 05 defined talents as:

> *Children and young people with special abilities in one or more areas who attend regular schools and institutions. A talent is a person who is good at something and has the potential to be one of the best if the talent is stimulated.* (Ministry of Education 2008, p. 3)

This definition associates talent with abilities and potential. Talent is thus described as something inherent that can be developed and place a person among "the best"; as a personal inherent quality that contributes to personal or individual competitive advantages. There is a strong element of a hereditary connotation, fitting a conception of talent as given by nature. However, the potential has to be stimulated for a person to benefit from these advantages. In other words, something exterior is added to the inner quality for the talent to unfold and thus places it somewhere between nature and nurture as an ongoing discussion about the origin and development of talents that is running among psychologists (Feldhusen 1998; Gardner 2002; Winstanley 2004).

The Talent fund really consolidated the current political focus on developing and incorporating talent development in the Danish educational system. It was established in 2005, under then minister of education in Denmark, Bertel Haarder, to help ensure that differentiated teaching also benefited gifted students. DKK 5 million were allocated annually for 2006 and 2007 to support talent development in the schools. The special allocation and the funded projects had followed in the wake of Talent Camp 05.

The establishment of the Talent fund secured resources to carry out talent development projects like the ones mentioned above. The Ministry of Education's (Ministry of Education 2008) justification for the talent fund was that differentiated teaching would also benefit gifted children and young people.

The special allocation funds targeted primary school, high school, vocational and higher education. The largest share of the funds went to the primary school where the projects typically focused on upskilling teachers to be able to spot talents and to develop educational offers, especially in science, targeted at gifted students. Large grants were allocated to the following projects (grants under DKK 100,000 are not included; place name in the projects is omitted; size of the grant in parentheses):

- Talent training in physics and chemistry for the older grades (DKK 150,000)
- Talent training in physics and chemistry for the older grades (DKK 100,000)
- "Young Scientists". Subsidy for research competition, including science/technology (DKK 250,000)
- Talent training in science and English/social studies (DKK 272,000)

- Upskilling teachers for talent spotting (DKK 406,800)
- Special educational offers in science for gifted students in 8th–9th grade across 27 schools (DKK 374,500)
- Talent training in physics and chemistry for the oldest grades (DKK 100,000)
- Continued talent training in science and English/social studies (DKK 272,000)
- Continued upskilling of teachers in talent spotting (DKK 406,800)
- Special educational offers in science for gifted students in 8th–9th grade across 27 schools (DKK 374,500)
- Subsidy for "Young Scientists" competition for primary school students interested in science/technology (DKK 250,000)
- National talent camp in mathematics, science and English for 9th grade (DKK 158,194)
- Three-year development project targeted at specially gifted children (DKK 741,150)
- Research competitions in science/technology subjects (DKK 250,000)
- Talent training offer in physics/chemistry for students in 8th and 9th grade (DKK 150,000)

The list illustrates that many of the funds were allocated to projects at primary school level. Certain project names appear multiple times because the list includes grants from 2006 and 2007. Some projects applied and won several times. A relatively large share of the funds was spent on establishing talent classes, most of them in Copenhagen and Northern Zealand and only a few in Jutland.

All projects listed as having obtained funding, included activities that took place after normal school hours, and some of them were specially planned educational offers for gifted students or for children with special abilities. This goes for the talent classes, as well as talent camps and talent training, especially within science subjects. The Ministry's talent fund thus awarded two of its largest grants to Special educational offers in science for gifted students, as they were officially called by the Ministry.

To be gifted or talented in the definition of the Ministry varies between being described as good at something and having special skills. Thus a talent is either a good student who already performs particularly well in a subject – preferably in natural sciences due to their assumed economic growth potential (Regeringen 2010), or the talent is a potential that can be developed under the right circumstances.

In a report on talent development to the parliamentary committee on education the Minister of Education explained the background for the talent initiative as follows:

> *In recent years, we have seen an increasing focus on making an extra effort for talents in the Danish educational system so that we can maintain and develop Denmark as a society in continued growth and prosperity. We cannot afford that young people with the will and talent to make a special effort lack challenges in our educational system and perhaps lose interest in taking an education.*

> *Denmark's competitiveness in the global knowledge society depends on our ability to develop talents. We therefore have to give the most gifted room to perform so that they can exploit their potential to the benefit of society and their own future.* (Haarder 2008, p. 1)

Talent development is justified as benefiting young people with will and talent as well as the country's economic growth, international competitiveness and development as a knowledge society.

The Maersk Science Centre for talent development in science was another major initiative; it involved the collaboration between the Danish government and shipping magnate Maersk Mc-Kinney Møller. The center was placed in Sorø on Zealand and opened in 2009. The A.P. Møller Fond donated DKK 130 million, and the Ministry of Education subsidized operations.

According to the centre's vision and strategy, the objective is "… to make extra curricula provisions for the talented pupils in science between 12 and 20 years" (Science Talent n.d.). The centre define itself as the physical framework for national talent development in sciences. It offers activities for young talents and their teachers in primary school and high school. It defines science talent and talent development as follows:

> *Science talents are students who are good at science and have potential to be among the best if that potential is stimulated.*
>
> *Talent development is about giving gifted students more challenges and develop their potential. Talents can contribute to improving the academic environment at the schools.*
>
> *The target group is children and young people with special gifts in one or more science fields and who attend regular schools.*

With its definition of talent as special abilities within one or more science fields, the knowledge centre aligns itself with the national strategy in education policy. It is implicit in the general discourse on talent development that talent is not sufficiently accommodated in the current school system, in which it is alleged that the focus on equality and inclusiveness has been detrimental to talent. This discourse of the neglected talents and that the public school system in Denmark is sacrificing talent in the name of equal access to education is similar to the ones found elsewhere in Europe (Ball 2008; Tomlinson 2008).

The policy agenda on talent development in the school system initiated by the Ministry of Education further involved the forming of an expert group to follow-up on its work programme, Denmark 2020 (Regeringen 2010), including prominent figures from education and research institutions, business and sports. The task that the expert group had been assigned by a parliamentary committee was to formulate strategies for talent development in the educational system and in the ensuing 'talent report', the parliamentary committee justified the increased focus on talent as follows:

> *Talent development is necessary in order to increase Danish competitiveness and thus preserve and develop the country's prosperity and welfare; because the gifted students inspire classmates, fellow students and teachers; and because too many gifted students, who have the right skills, have become demotivated and tired of school. A greater focus on talents will benefit all.* (Ministry of Education 2011, p. 5)

The link between talent development and a necessity to increase national competitiveness clearly emphasizes education as an economic vehicle for growth in which the development of gifted and talented is crucial. The economic logic behind this, however, is a move away from the focus on a rise in education levels generally to a focus on the few individual students considered gifted and talented – though emphasizing that this focus will be of 'benefit to all'.

Translating Talent Class Activities in a Local Municipal Context

The national education policy objectives for talent development translated locally, by the ministry grant awarding of projects, in local municipalities and schools. In the following, we zoom in on the case study of such a project of talent classes, in one municipality and how, in this local context and on several occasions, the idea of the project was presented before the actual application and implementation of it. The specific design of the project in the form of talent classes and various practical issues were only finally agreed and determined after the grant had been awarded. Other models were discussed before the final model for talent classes was settled on.

The original idea was to offer 12–14 students with special talents and interests in the school extra teaching 1 day per week. The plan for admission to the talent classes was that interested students would write an application and then be invited to an interview. Applicants would be young people with a high academic level, outgoing personality and open for greater challenges, e.g. a study trip to another country. Deadline for applications was first set for early June 2006 but was extended until after the summer vacation to allow everybody to apply. The project group also explained to the media that the deadline was extended to make sure that the message reached all parents (local newspapers – June 1 and June 29, 2006).

The concept behind the project met some resistance among local politicians and school people. They objected to the idea of strengthening inclusiveness in primary schools by putting more focus on the most gifted students and especially to the original idea that the students who were selected would be removed from their regular classes once a week to attend the talent classes. The critics saw this as an elite move and a reintroduction of streaming, as a threat to the students' social fellowship at their home schools, as a way to spend a lot of money on few students, and as disrespectful of hardworking primary school teachers. They suggested spending the resources on introducing other forms of teaching in general in 8th–10th grade, which the students are calling for, and that experimental teaching should be conducted at a municipal primary school instead of the high school (local newspapers – August 11, August 14, and September 14, 2006).

The steering group accommodated parts of the criticism; in particular, the concern about the students being affected if they were removed from regular teaching 1 day a week to attend the talent class. By placing the talent classes outside normal

school hours, to the extent possible, they ensured that the students did not have to miss regular class. By doing so, they also countered the criticism that participation in talent class might harm the social ties to their regular classes.

By deadline, August 11, 2006, 91 young people had applied for enrolment in the talent class. The applicants came from 8th and 9th grade at 18 different schools from the entire municipality, although the majority (57) came from the main town in the municipality and larger urban schools, including 19 from the private school in the main town. In the media, the initiators expressed satisfaction with the high number of applicants, which meant that they had to select the best of them. The original idea was that selection would be based on an interview with each applicant, but due to the large number, the steering group decided to make the selection based on tests.

During the week of the tests, all applicants and their parents were invited to an introduction and information meeting at the high school. The initiators presented the project and its underlying philosophy, and the future talent class teachers introduced themselves and their views of the project. The local school politician, the chairman of the municipality's child and education committee, who had supported the project throughout the application phase and its dissemination and critical reception in the community, also expressed his visions for the talent class.

In his speech, he described the project as an "experiment" that is based on the concept of inclusiveness in the school in the sense that as many students as possible are adequately challenged. With reference to the three-digit millions that are spent on helping the weakest, he said that this project would spend a fraction on the most gifted. Inspired by elite studies in sports and music, the project asked questions like: Can we go further? What happens to children and young people when they are allowed to immerse themselves in a subject? When they are allowed to follow a tangent as far as it goes? Finally, he expressed appreciation that the high school had agreed to participate in the project "to lift the academic level" (Field notes from the information meeting, August 21, 2006).

In addition to the reference to (the lack of) inclusiveness in the primary school, the project implied a political prioritization of science subjects. This is evident in the effort to assume a strategic position in a broader context and secure broad political support. Reinforcement of teaching in science subjects is an element in the government's education policy, which at this time was supported by the opposition. At the local level, the school renovated and expanded its science classrooms right before the project started.

Concluding Discussion: The Talent Agenda and Competing Policy Rationales

The public school in Denmark up through the twentieth century gradually developed into an undivided comprehensive school system, which was to provide education for all children regardless of social origin. This development started formally

with the 1958 school act, which launched a long-term trend in education policy with gradual and continuous elimination of streaming as a main theme. It was based on the thinking of the welfare state that the educational system would have to cultivate unexploited talent from all, including the lower, societal strata more efficiently, and that this would require a flexible educational system in which the definitive choice between different educational streams was postponed as long as possible.

In the early 1990s, the "specially gifted" figure emerged in discourses about inclusiveness in education internationally (UNESCO 1994) and nationally. The principle of differentiated teaching is intended to ensure inclusiveness in Danish schools and give all students adequate challenges in relation to their abilities (talents). This principle was introduced with the 1993 Primary School Act, which abolished the remnants of streaming in the primary school. The act followed a new education policy, which over the past decades has been characterized by a focus on social justice and equal access to education for all. In contemporary education, talent is associated with an objective to educate the intelligence reserves in the segments with lower education, to allow the collective "talent mass" to grow. The discursive logic of this argument is closely affiliated with the human capital theory of what among others Stephen Ball has called 'the competition state' (Ball 2009).

In the late twentieth century, increased globalization and international competition caused a shift in education policy where individualization and human capital gained significant influence in education policy objectives. International rankings and comparisons were used to legitimize the 2006 school act, which toned down democratic and personal education and prioritized knowledge and skills as the primary purpose in school. The earlier recommended teaching objectives were changed to mandatory end goals and milestones in the form of binding learning objectives for the students at specific points in time. More goals and more measuring summarize the most important changes in the school area where the equality-minded and inclusive school was criticized for promoting mediocracy at the expense of talent.

With inspiration from abroad, especially the USA, the individualization trend becomes increasingly pronounced in education policy objectives. From 2005, different initiatives to promote talent development in the school and the educational system in general appear. Via prizes and competitions, the school will stimulate cultivation and nurture of all potential talents, who according to the rationale are a precondition for Denmark's international competitiveness. Similar to American and British models for talent development, the rationale behind the talent initiatives is thus primarily economic motives based on optimal development of each individual's resources (rather than the group's) as a prerequisite for national economic growth. In that sense the rise of what has been called 'the global testing culture' (Smith 2016) signifies a shift in the way education is enacted; which in a wider sense is an indication that the very workings of the welfare state have changed.

The national rhetoric on talent development breaks through to local contexts. However, a more democratic rationale can be identified at the local level where the fellowship of the class – the rub-off effect on the other students – is used as an argument for the talent class. In the Bourdieusian conception of state this finding indicates a discrepancy between 'the higher state nobility' and 'the lower state nobility'

even if it is also a clear confirmation of the power struggles going on within the bureaucratic field of the state. As such – and in addition – bridging and competence development for teachers are elements that can be seen as both economic and pedagogical rationales.

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Chapter 4
Talent Class Activities in a Danish School Context

Introduction

In this chapter, we analyse the framework and organization of talent classes in a particular public school context in Denmark. We consider the local context of setting up talent classes, the political background of the talent class project and the recruitment of students and teachers for the classes. We begin by outlining the relatively simple organization and division of labour behind the project and then look at cooperative relations and cultures among the teachers in the project.

As mentioned in Chap. 1, the study of the talent classes was based on ethnographic fieldwork combining different types of data. As for the organisational analyses in this chapter, it involved methodological triangulation of documentary study, observations of meetings and interviews with the agents at the different levels of the programme. This included interviewing most teachers involved in the programme activities to obtain their views and experiences of the talent class programmes. Thus, all four teachers involved in the first year were interviewed and nine of the 13 teachers (the nine most involved) in the second year were interviewed. They constitute the core of the data analysed in this chapter.

The analyses illustrate how the agents on different levels of the programme and coming from different teacher cultures, approach and experience the talent agenda in different ways. This creates an organisational dynamics in which many professional standards and aspects of teacher commitment are at play.

Public School Context and the Project's Point of Origin

The case study school context is located in a provincial municipality, which is relatively small (about 65,000 citizen) and situated in a peripheral area with mainly rural and small-sized towns. Its main town has about 26,000 citizens) and is located

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in one of the smallest regions (as regards population) in Denmark. At the time of the talent class project the municipality had about 20 schools, distributed over a large geographical area.

The establishing of talent classes in this municipality was commenced in 2006, when a local public school principal took the initiative, applied for and obtained a project grant from the Ministry of Education to establish talent classes for students, aged 15–16, from lower secondary schools.

In the application to the Ministry of Education (Application text) the purpose of the talent classes was defined as,

- to establish teaching that accommodates students with special resources (academically and personally) and great interest in school work
- to cultivate the good example that leads other young people
- to create a culture in which it is "in" to work intensively with school assignments
- to create bridging (form closer contact between lower secondary school teachers and upper secondary school teachers)
- to enable continuing development of lower secondary school teachers' competences
- to build a teaching environment where the students can become internationally oriented and build an international network
- to make young people more interested in school work

The target group for the talent classes was defined as students with *special resources and interest* in the school. The application did not emphasize resources and interests in specific subjects but rather the school in a broad sense, and "special resources and interests" were thus open for interpretation. The international dimension may have been included as something that could have a particular appeal to the student target group.

The purpose of the talent classes is especially clear in the formulations concerning cultivating the good example and creating culture. It implies that the teaching will be an example for general teaching in the school. This is supported by the last bullet point, where the target group definition may include young people in general, i.e. participants in the talent classes as well as others.

Another dimension is development of teachers' competences. This is specifically formulated as the opportunity for bridging between lower secondary and upper secondary school teachers, and in a more open formulation that does not specifically define competence development for teachers.

The local school principal who took the initiative to the talent classes had participated in Talent Camp 05 and relayed the idea about talent development to the local community. In addition, the Ministry of Education's press release about talent development had been noticed by the municipality, which had a tradition for applying for development projects and on that background encouraged local schools to launch talent projects. The principal had contacted the neighbouring upper secondary school to establish a partnership and the vice mayor, when contacted, also promised to support the project. With the partnerships in place, the organizers contacted

the Ministry of Education in spring 2006, and the Ministry supplied information and guidance on a project application. Eventually, the application was submitted and successfully obtained a grant.

The next step was to inform schools in the municipality about the project. In June 2006, a letter was sent to all principals and school boards (also at free and private schools) with the following introduction: "The Ministry of Education has selected the municipality in collaboration with the upper secondary school to test a pilot project in talent development." With this opening, the letter may give the impression that the Ministry of Education took the initiative to the talent classes. However, as described above, local actors were in fact behind the initiative. The letter contained information about planned content in the talent classes, its implementation at the local upper secondary school, the planned affiliation with research, the overall objectives of the project and preliminary selection criteria for students in the talent development.

By sending the letter to all schools in the municipality, the project group showed its intention to reach all 8th and 9th graders in the municipality. However, the project was primarily anchored at the school where the idea was born. Two teachers (lower secondary) from this school took part in the project. Of the four teachers assigned to the project, two others came from the upper secondary school. In addition, the project initiators, the principal and the deputy head of department of the local school each functioned as contact teacher for a talent class (ultimately two talent classes were formed) and participated in the steering group of the project, which also included the principal and vice principal of the upper secondary school [*gymnasiet*].

Recruitment of Teachers

The teaching in the talent classes was divided between two upper secondary school teachers and two teachers from the local lower secondary school. The upper secondary school teachers, LISE and DORTE, were employed as respectively lecturer in mathematics and English and lecturer in biology and upper secondary school student counsellor. The two lower secondary school teachers, JETTE and HANS, taught English (J) and physics/chemistry and mathematics (H), respectively. In the beginning, an additional English teacher was loosely affiliated with the classes and only taught them in connection with talent camps. The four permanent teachers already taught full-time and some even had extra work at their respective educational institutions – so what made them want to work with the talent classes? They used motivations like increased knowledge of future upper secondary school students, strengthening bridge building between lower secondary school and upper secondary school and being able to concentrate on the academic aspect of their teaching.

The upper secondary school teacher LISE, who was teaching mathematics in the talent class, also had a managerial function as inspector. She was therefore close to

the headmaster and had been asked whether she wanted to join the talent project. She had participated in several development projects already and therefore chose to accept this project. She said she enjoyed launching a process which could later be passed on to someone else, so her "jumping at the offer turned out to be a good decision." She also agreed to teach the classes, as she found it important to participate in this aspect of the project, where you "get your hands dirty", making it easier to see what might be changed and improved.

LISE's personal interest in the project was based on a wish to better understand first-year upper secondary school students. Through her talent-class teaching she hoped to get a bit closer to understanding the development processes experienced by the students just before and after the transition to upper secondary school, where she found that they "often lack commitment" and are distracted during classes. She considered the project an opportunity for the upper secondary school to get some "free advertising". By participating in such a project, the upper secondary school may be able to improve the transition program to the benefit of its future students. She also thought it was important for the upper secondary school to be more open toward the nearby schools and to demonstrate that "we get our students from lower secondary schools, and we are interested in cooperation with them."

The upper secondary school teacher DORTE, who was teaching biology in the talent class, had also been asked directly if she wanted to participate. In addition to teaching at the upper secondary school, she was a student counsellor and therefore had a lot of contact with the lower secondary schools. She believed that she had been asked because the project initiator knew her from the counselling function at the school where he used to teach. Initially, she declined, because she already had a lot of work and overtime. But after reconsidering it, she was persuaded to participate as she found it interesting, and she explained her support of the project as follows:

> *I think it is okay to say that you want to learn something, that the young people can be ambitious, and that it is perfectly okay to be dedicated to one's school work. Because of course that has not been the case for many years. It is the Law of Jante that 'you should not believe you are special'. I think it is okay that we have something to offer those who want this.* (DORTE)

Discussions on social mobility and learning are full of references to the Law of Jante, as a special Danish expression stating that one should not stand out from the majority and that those who do, are looked down upon (Jenkins 2012, p. 45). DORTE here expresses dissociation with this phenomenon, which allegedly blocks ambition.

The lower secondary school teacher JETTE, who was teaching English to the talent classes, had joined the project via her principal (the project initiator). She described herself as "committed to her subject", that she had accepted the offer as a challenge, and found the prospect of teaching the talent classes "incredibly exciting". She mentioned that she was happy to teach at half past three in the afternoon when it involved these young people, because she looked forward to it. She found the teaching self-developing and rewarding because it allowed her to focus on the

academic content. In her view it stood in opposition to regular lower secondary school teaching, where the teachers "spend a lot of time on disciplinary problems", whereas talent class teachers "never have to scold students", and that this made all the difference.

The lower secondary school teacher HANS was involved in the project already in the planning stage. The project initiator asked whether he wanted to participate as teacher of physics/chemistry if the project received funding. He immediately said yes, as he found the project interesting. As described, he put a lot of energy into his teaching:

> *Well, you see, I have had to prepare a lot for the classes. And each class has unfolded new things that I have had to acquaint myself with in order to be one step ahead the students' questions. I am able to cover a lot of material during two hours with a group of students like that. Whereas the academic challenge more or less disappears, when you have taught a subject for many years and feel academically competent. Of course, you follow the development of the subject and the new disciplines that may be introduced, but at lower secondary school level such changes are relatively small.* (HANS)

HANS primarily associated the talent class with academic challenges. The expectation of meeting the "talented students" stimulated the energy he put into his preparations, and he made an extra effort. Teaching regular lower secondary school classes does not appear to challenge him academically to the same extent or to require extraordinary preparation as he can draw on wide academic competences and many years of experience.

The teachers' reasons for participating in the project overlapped, but there are slight differences from an educational perspective. The upper secondary school teachers emphasized gaining more knowledge of future students and easing the transition from lower secondary school, which can be considered a predominantly *social dimension* of talent development. The lower secondary school teachers emphasized being challenged academically, which can be considered an *academic dimension* of talent development. We will return to these dimensions of the teacher profession below.

Organization and Division of Labour

The organization of the professional network behind the talent classes was established in the spring of 2006. The participants in the preliminary meetings were the project initiator, the principal at the local lower secondary school responsible for the initiative, the principal and vice-principal at the local upper secondary school and the president of the municipal child and youth committee, who appointed themselves to the project steering group and day-to-day management. The initiative's origins in management resulted in a distinct division of tasks and thus also the content of the teaching. As we shall see, the content of teaching was not bound to the overall idea or coherence in the project and it was therefore difficult to establish coherence.

In addition to the overall management, both talent classes had an administrative management responsible for the direct and indirect contact with the students concerning social events and dissemination of information. The principal and head of department at the local school were responsible for the administrative management, as they functioned as contact teachers for the eighth and ninth grades, respectively. This is the management that is referred to in the differentiation between teacher and manager below.

There was thus a general division of labour between the managers and the teachers. The managers were primarily responsible for planning and implementing social activities. Planning included, for example, timetabling of teaching, which was structured as single-subject modules and followed a traditional teaching model with separate subjects. This involved some coordination, as the timetabling had to consider the teachers' employment and working hours at the upper secondary school and lower secondary school. The reason the managers also managed the classes' social activities, such as food and accommodation at weekend camps, it was argued, was that the project had limited funds, and this division entailed that no (extra) teacher hours had to be allocated for such tasks.

Almost all the hours allocated to the teachers were dedicated to teaching. Some considered the distinct division of labour between the management and the teachers unsatisfactory. As one of the lower secondary school teachers explained, due to the strong specialization of tasks the teachers lacked the social dimension of the work potentially provided by a homeroom teacher function. Likewise, the separation of administrative functions caused frustration among teachers, when relevant information, for example about a talent camp, was distributed too late. "Because as homeroom teacher you would have made sure to enter it into the calendar," a teacher said.

The need for coordination between the teachers from two different contexts made it difficult for the teachers to cooperate. It would otherwise have been a good chance for teachers within such a development context to establish cross-disciplinary cooperation on a shared topic. The upper secondary school teacher DORTE explained the problem:

> *Of course it is difficult when HANS is at his school and I am here. If we had to cooperate on something, we would first have to identify the topic, which has been difficult for us, and second, find out how to do it, because the timetable has been drawn up with two chemistry lessons, two biology lessons afterwards, and so on.* (DORTE)

DORTE considered the physical distance and academic framework of the timetabled teaching an obstacle to cross-disciplinary cooperation between the two groups of teachers. As a logical consequence, she also considered it far too time-consuming.

In connection with a talent camp, efforts were made to establish closer cooperation between the two science teachers. But the cooperation was not realized because "we could not agree on a topic," DORTE said. According to HANS, they had identified a topic, which was a result of wishes from the students, and which his subject would be able to shed light on. He presented his plans to DORTE, who "had imagined something slightly different". The cooperation was abandoned. Thus, it seems

that not all teachers shared the desire to establish more cooperation and that their academic differences may have acted as a barrier to establishing closer cooperation.

Different Teacher Cultures

Upper secondary school teachers and lower secondary school teachers differ in terms of training. The training of upper secondary school teachers involves strong academic specialization in individual subjects, while the training of lower secondary school teachers, in addition to a greater pedagogical content, covers several subjects as well as General Didactics and the Didactic Dimension of the Teaching Profession. The education of teachers for the upper secondary school in Denmark is a theoretical study that takes place at universities, while education of teachers for the *Folkeskole*, the municipal primary and lower secondary school in Denmark, is a mixed study of theory and practice, and takes places at university colleges for teacher training (Foldberg 1985).

Thus, upper secondary school teachers have trained as specialists in specific subjects, while lower secondary school teachers to a greater extent have trained as generalists and didacticians. Around these different starting points, distinctive cultures for upper secondary school and lower secondary school have developed, and they have come to characterize the teachers' socialization into the profession, their *academic habitus* (Bourdieu 2005). Lower secondary school teachers' training and practice are thus related to a didactic tradition of formation based in philosophy, while upper secondary school teachers' training and practice are related to a curriculum tradition that emphasizes learning and learning goals and is based in psychology (Gundem and Hopmann 2002).

In addition to differing views on whether the teachers had or should have cooperated more, it was evident that the teachers had different views on other aspects of the teaching. LISE described these differences:

> *DORTE and I feel that although it is an elective, of course the students should be given homework. Of course, you have to prepare for class. Whereas JETTE and HANS are more of the opinion that we should not give them homework. (…) We have always been used to a situation where, of course the students have homework, so of course these students should too. But a shared view of such basic things like giving the students homework, expecting the students to prepare for class, insisting that the students to come to the blackboard and demanding that they do presentations, we have never had that.* (LISE)

This statement reveals a clear distinction between "us" and "them" and the teachers' different academic habitus (Bourdieu 2005). This is evident from the upper secondary school teachers' view that the lower secondary school teachers make fewer demands on the students. It comes naturally to the upper secondary school teachers to make the same demands in the form of preparation and presentation on the talent class students as on their upper secondary school students. In their curriculum-oriented culture, focus is on learning and academic goals. The lower secondary school teachers assign more weight to the students' schooling beyond the

talent class, which goes beyond it. Based on their academic culture, they focus on the students as whole persons, whose formation rests both on the academic dimension of their schooling and on their social lives in and outside school. Therefore, they are more inclined to let the students decide whether they want to prepare for the talent class.

Development of the Project Organization

In January 2007, at the initiator's request, a planning meeting for talent development in the academic year 2007–2008 was held. Representatives from five lower secondary schools in the municipality, the head of the municipal 'after school classes' *[Ungdomsskolen]*, the head of the music school and a representative (counsellor) from the municipal child and youth department attended the meeting. The ground had thus been prepared for expanding the talent classes, to involve more actors, to root the project in the municipality, and to establish a talent centre.

New actors entered the scene and expressed new views on the project. At the meeting, the principal who would later become part of the steering group and pedagogically responsible for the new eighth grade advocated for increased focus on *interest* and *motivation* in the talent development recruitment process and argued that the individual schools should be responsible for picking out their talents. The head of the after school classes offered to coordinate the talent development effort in the long term. He was also interested in establishing a group for "bubbles", which was his term for students who were not accepted in the talent classes but could be considered a "growth layer". A working group was established to continue work on the talent centre idea. The members were the two principals (from the former and future steering groups), the head of the after school classes, the head of department of Higher Commercial Examination and Higher Technical Examination at the vocational college, the upper secondary school headmaster, the head of the music school and the counsellor from the department for children and youth at the municipality.

In February 2007, the talent-centre working group met to discuss, among other things, how to define talent in the future. The preliminary definition was *academic skills – awarded with the grade 10 or higher, attitude, motivation, hard work/diligence and discipline.* In addition, the minutes stated that the talent classes must be reserved for the most talented students and that an effort should be made not to accept "foot draggers" who want an extra push before transition to upper secondary school. A decision regarding admission criteria was postponed.

After the preliminary meetings in January and February 2007, a new and more widely rooted steering group was established with a president and project manager from the municipality, an executive manager from the after school classes and two pedagogical managers of the eighth and ninth grades, respectively, who are also

principals at two lower secondary schools. The word "wider" indicates a separation of functions compared to the previous steering group. For example, finances and administration have been separated from the idea behind the original project. In the top political layer, the politician has been replaced by a civil servant, and even though the first steering group also included a manager responsible for both eighth and ninth grade, the new steering group was different because the management of each grade had different agendas. They did not have the same overall project goal or vision, and they did not work together on the project application for the ministry. One worked for a "narrow", elitist understanding that follows the above-mentioned definition of talent; the other strived to implement a wider understanding of talent.

Unlike the previous steering group, the top management contained no representatives from upper secondary education. It consisted exclusively of people from the after school classes and lower secondary school area. The character of the group had changed towards a more financially and administratively governing body, which meant that the idea behind the project had been separated from the overall management. There was some disagreement as to how the organization was structured and one's view of the organization depended on one's position in the hierarchy or network. The upper secondary school managers and teachers, especially the newly arrived, considered the new organization a distinctly hierarchical management structure with the steering group headed by the president at the top level. However, the municipal steering group president had a different view of the new organization:

> *We are equal actors organized in a network around this cooperation. Where it is something we agree on, and where the municipality, in my view, has taken on the coordinating function as the first among equals. We have appointed a couple of project managers as academic managers, and the terms of participation for everyone else are that if they do not feel that their interests are being met, and if this continues, then they must resign.* (President of the steering group)

By defining his task as a coordinating function as the "first among equals" the president referred to a financial construction that could not be governed politically by the municipality, because it did not have absolute control of the funds each upper secondary school invested in the project. The project would only run as long as there was a financial basis for it. The municipality or a school may be the first to resign from the project. On that basis, a flat management structure was the most suitable. Moreover, as mentioned, the managerial level – at least at the civil servant level – did not consider the conceptual and pedagogical sides of the project.

In accordance with the expanded organization and the many new participants, the project applied for funds from the Ministry of Education to establish *The Local Talent Centre* (fictitious name). The awarded grant was slightly larger than the previous grant. Funds from the upper secondary school, the vocational college and the municipality were added and almost doubled the Local Talent Centre budget.

Intake of New Actors

The new and larger organization behind the talent classes was indicative of expanded collaboration and more actors. In addition to the executive manager from the municipality, the head of the after school classes and another lower secondary school principal joining the steering group, two new upper secondary schools, a commercial upper secondary school, a technical upper secondary school, and thus new teachers, joined the project. Moreover, the after school classes had been introduced as a mediating factor between the municipality and the schools.

Moreover, the after school classes was introduced as a mediating factor between municipality and schools due to its wide network among the youth group. It had the contacts and distribution network and could, for example, distribute materials to the entire target group, which individual principals would not be able to do to the same extent. Since the municipal after school classes fall under different legislation, it played an important part in the organization as it could offer alternative teaching without having to meet demands stipulated in the Act on Lower Secondary School [Folkeskoleloven] concerning lessons and joint goals.

However, the expansion of the organization and the intake of new actors also resulted in increased complexity and more diverging views of the talent project. The interests expressed at the preliminary meetings in the beginning of 2007 already indicated different project factions in terms of which educational institutions should be involved as central actors, understanding of talent development in general, duration of involvement, that is, whether an actor had been involved from the beginning (the 2006–2007 talent classes) or had just joined the project.

The original project initiator was of the opinion that the upper secondary school and vocational college should be co-applicants in the application to the Ministry of Education and thus be represented in the steering group. According to the minutes of the first meeting, an initial steering group was established, which also included managers from the music school, the upper secondary school and the vocational college. This group acted as a preparatory talent centre working group, before a new, administrative steering group took over. This group exclusively comprised managers from the municipality, the lower secondary school and the after school classes – that is, none from the upper secondary schools and the music school.

In the administrative steering group, the newly included lower secondary school principal represented a different understanding of and approach to talent development than his colleague, the initiator of the project. As mentioned, he did not agree with the way the idea of talent classes had originally been presented, as he considered the term too elitist and narrow. He wanted to approach the project through a wider understanding of talent; it was based on his opposition to the original idea, which he became more sympathetic toward, though. About his original opposition he said that it changed during the course of the project.

What started as a protest against the talent classes thus developed into a commitment to the talent project. As he joined the project, the principal adopted the understanding and discourse that lower secondary schools overlook some children and

that the talent classes can do something for these children. He also talked about the project as a way of profiling the school, which suggests that it is just as much a question of having adopted and being part of the existing political discourse on marketing and profiling of state institutions, including educational institutions. This goes especially for the upper secondary educational institutions, which due to the structural reform and its abolishment of the counties had now become self-governing institutions with governing boards of external stakeholders.

The principal who was the initiator of the idea and project application left the talent centre in the spring of 2007. This combined with the new management structure made the project structure more fragmented and mono-institutional. The new project framework made it even more difficult to establish cooperation between the upper secondary school and lower secondary school teachers than the year before.

At manager and middle manager levels, the organization was now characterized by two factions: the "protest project" group, which was responsible for the management of the eighth year group, and the "inheritors", who now manage and conduct project work because their immediate superiors for various reasons have left the project. They have thus been given a job they did not necessarily take part in defining. They have accepted the job for various reasons because they recognize its potentials. All the inheritors are affiliated with the ninth grade, and they are closer to the original project than the newly arrived actors.

Due to the new grouping and organizational division, the eighth-grade talent class differed from the remaining talent classes. In terms of content, it was an extension of the original opposition to the talent project, and it was based on a wider understanding of talent than the one outlined in the application. In several respects, the eighth-grade talent class resembled an after school class more than a talent class as it only offered two lessons at a time, was not conducted in "cooperation" with the upper secondary school and did not include a social element in the form of talent camps.

More Professional Standards at Play

The expansion of the organization behind the talent classes initially resulted in a larger number of talent classes specialized in the professional standards of the various upper secondary schools. Once it had been assessed how many students applied for the talent classes and for which talent classes, three talent classes could be established within three areas of academic specialization.

The admission procedure had been changed to include a combination of self-selection and appointment by the schools. All 53 applicants were accepted and one eighth-grade language class with 25 students, two ninth-grade talent classes, one commercial talent class with seven students and one science talent class with 21 students were formed. Compared to the previous year, the gender distribution in the three classes was less balanced, with a majority of girls in the language and commercial classes and a majority of boys in the science class. The gender and

school distribution in the three classes are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The new classes also caused an expansion and change in the composition of the teaching staff. A total of 13 teachers were affiliated to the three talent classes: two lower secondary school teachers in the eighth-grade language class, five technical upper secondary school teachers in the commercial talent class and six teachers (two from the commercial upper secondary school, three from the upper secondary school and one from the lower secondary school) in the science class.

In the latter group, three teachers had participated the previous year: HANS from the local lower secondary school and the two upper secondary school teachers LISE and DORTE. The third upper secondary school teacher in the group, HOLGER, taught physics, astronomy, and mathematics, and two technical upper secondary school teachers, JENS and SØREN, taught biology and project work, respectively.

The lower secondary school teacher JETTE, who had also participated the previous year, was meant to teach the commercial talent class, but she had to resign for personal reasons. Therefore, the teaching was conducted exclusively by technical upper secondary school teachers. Here RITA became the main figure. She had worked in the private sector and held a BA in Business Languages (English).

Two new lower secondary school teachers, GITTE and ULLA, were affiliated to the eighth grade. They came from the same lower secondary school as the principal in the new steering group. They had many years' experience teaching English in lower secondary school, were used to working together on English teaching in the older classes and cooperated closely on this talent class.

The talent centre had as one of its explicit aims to promote bridge building and understanding between different school cultures through cross-institutional teacher cooperation. However, the conditions for teacher cooperation were relatively unchanged and followed the same model as the previous year, meaning that the students were taught by class and by the teacher(s) mastering the timetabled subject. Similarly, the degree of cooperation did not increase compared to the previous year, just as the teachers did not fully agree on the value of such cooperation. Some teachers, both lower secondary school teachers and upper secondary school teachers, did not feel a need to cooperate with the other teachers. A few said that they could not see what they would gain from such cooperation.

Still, the teachers did not want to come across as unwilling to cooperate. They may be part of so many working relations in their everyday work that they do not feel a need to or have the energy to enter new ones. One upper secondary school teacher said that he did recognize the value of it, but that the upper secondary school reform already required teachers to cooperate extensively. He thus had difficulties making room for new collaborations. However, for the lower secondary school teacher HANS, who also participated the previous year, the expanded talent class concept has led to new collaborations and increased the output of his cooperation with the upper secondary schools:

> *I actually feel that I have cooperated more than last year. That is, I have done like a completely parallel course together with the upper secondary school physics teacher where we took turns, and I think it has been educational. I have also met with him to discuss planning*

and things like that, and I think it has been great. I have also met with the technical upper secondary school teachers, so in many ways I have engaged in more cooperation. It is probably also because I am looking for some of the things I am missing in general then I have tried to show up as often as possible, when I did not participate. (HANS)

His views regarding the more cooperation has to do with his decision to put extra resources into the project and be physically present outside his own teaching. In other words, by being present when the other teachers were teaching, he had educational inspiration from the upper secondary school teachers.

Diverging Ambitions

Different motives and interests were at the root of the actors' participation in the Talent Centre. Some interests were in direct continuation of the original idea of introducing initiatives for a specific group of students; other motives for participating in the Talent Centre were related to the opportunities it offered in terms of recruitment of students. Some teachers thus found, like their superiors, that participation in the talent project to a large extent was a question of profiling their own institutions and study programs.

The new teachers did not agree on the aim and point of the talent classes. The individual teacher's ambition and personal commitment to the project was, among other things, reflected in the way the teacher joined the project, the extent of their teaching in the talent class and other context in which they would teach.

HOLGER was hired to teach the talent class due to his unique knowledge of physics and astronomy. He coordinated a four-lesson course where he taught the first and last lessons. HANS taught the second and third lessons and attended HOLGER's lessons as a listener and assistant. He described his affiliation with the talent class as that of an "appendage", and he did not develop a personal relation to the students or knew their names. He considered the talent class "any other external job teaching someone who comes and goes and with whom you do not really have time to get involved". However, the loose affiliation and limited hours suited him fine, as he already had many regular teaching hours and a lot of work, "so this actually came on top of a lot of existing overtime," and he did not get much involved in the aim and purpose of the talent class. However, he stressed that it was important for the upper secondary school to participate in the project, because the "competing upper secondary schools" did. So only when they participated in talent classes should the upper secondary school do so too, he argued.

JENS, a newly appointed teacher at the technical upper secondary school, arrived after the summer break. He had trained as a researcher in biology and previously taught at university. He was asked during his job interview whether he wanted to participate in the talent class project. He stressed that it was not something he "was asked to do", but something he was interested in and found fun and interesting, even though it meant he had to teach more hours than originally planned. On the question of its relevance, he said:

Personally I just think it is a lot of fun. And of course, I also think you might learn a bit. But of course, it is not something a lot of schools do. I have heard that there are two talent class projects, I think. So, I thought it sounded fun. Also when you have to meet colleagues at a later point, that is, CV-wise, then it is fun to have participated in talent teaching and be able to put down that you have participated in that kind of special teaching. (JENS)

The project's relevance to JENS was first and foremost the here-and-now experience of "having fun". He mentions it several times, but he also indicates that his participation will be useful to him in the long term: you "can learn a bit" and add it to your CV. He refers to the talent class as special teaching and thus indicates that he considers it an extended course targeted at a special group of students. He has not considered whether it is relevant for the school to participate in this type of project and invest extra resources, or whether the project is justified in a wider perspective.

SØREN was another teacher from the technical upper secondary school, where he had been employed to teach communication and technology for 10 years. He cooperated with JENS on projects in the science talent class. Like his colleague, he found it personally satisfying to participate in the project, as it presented him with professional challenges, partly in following JENS's teaching, partly because students may ask him questions and to which he must find the answers. He also recognized a different interest in the project, which he described as follows:

Of course the school also has an interest in using it to attract students; there is no doubt about that. The school also considers it a chance to market itself. And of course these are some attractive students – any upper secondary school would want them, naturally. (SØREN)

According to his point of view, talent classes can both contribute to marketing the school's study programs, help "poach" "attractive students" and thereby secure the academic quality of the school.

Just like all the other teachers, GITTE and ULLA were asked by their superior if they wanted to participate in the project. They both have many years' experience teaching English and found that it would be an interesting project to cooperate on and that it would give them "a chance to teach a group of students who participated voluntarily and wanted to be there," as ULLA says. GITTE says almost the same thing, though she also stresses that it put her in a bit of a dilemma, as she felt it encouraged "idolization of the elite", which did not suit her. Contrary to the other talent class teachers, she said that she has encountered similar scepticism among her colleagues. "Lower secondary school teachers generally have difficulties idolizing that side of the elite," she explained.

Talent was defined differently in the new organization than in the original project. It focused more on the academic aspect, while talent in the original project was associated with a general interest in the school subjects, which *would be linked together by social activities.* The predominant understanding of talent no longer concerned the need for special social events or space for talents, such as talent camps. Initially, some of the new teachers did not realize that study trips and camps would also be part of the concept. The planning was delayed, and it became

impossible to fit them in between the teachers' other activities. This meant that several of the teachers never got to participate in talent camps with their class.

The number of lower secondary school teachers vis-à-vis the increased number of upper secondary school teachers also indicated a new turn. The first year, the lower secondary school teachers were responsible for the social, non-academic dimension of the project. The advantage was that the social dimension was assigned special weight. The disadvantage was that it was separated from the teachers and the performance of the academic dimension of the project. In the following academic year, only one lower secondary school teacher was affiliated with the ninth grade – not two, as had been the case the previous year. The two lower secondary school teachers who were teaching the eighth grade had not participated in talent camps or in any type of teacher exchange or cooperation with the upper secondary schools.

Concluding Discussion: The Talent Agenda in Local Organisation

The teachers were chosen for their employment within specific disciplines and at the educational institutions at which the initiative originated. They are typically already involved in extra activities at their school, for example management, counselling, projects or external examination. The project saw little cooperation between the teachers within the same subject or across subjects. They had little knowledge of what the others were teaching. More extensive cooperation on planning and implementation did not occur, as it was considered difficult to carry out and far too resource-demanding considering the number of hours the individual teachers could allocate to this extra work.

The organization behind the two talent class courses changed from a relatively simple to a complex structure. The talent classes went from being rooted in a small group affiliated with one lower secondary school and one upper secondary school to a talent centre in which many more institutions were involved. The active project partners were lower secondary schools, several upper secondary schools, the after school classes and the municipality.

In addition to more institutions, the organization comprised more and to some extent diverging interests. Internal opposing interests emerged between an elitist orientation and a wider orientation and whether the main aim was to favour a special group of students, whom the general school system, it was believed, failed to challenge suitably, or to profile the participating educational institutions in the light of the structural reform and their new status as self-governing institutions. In this sense, the implementation of talent classes reveals some of the dichotomies between the logics of the welfare state and the competition state. Increased marketization is among other places visible in the focus on branding institutions and improving teacher CVs.

Many professional standards and aspects of teacher commitment were at stake in the talent classes. The variation comprised lower secondary school teachers, upper secondary school teachers, and researchers from linguistic and scientific disciplines, which caused great diversification both in level of education and professional approach. In addition, the teachers' degree of affiliation varied from the part-time teacher who did not know the students' names to the committed teacher whose effort could be characterized as voluntary work and self-development.

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Chapter 5
Identification and Classification of the Talented Students

Introduction

This chapter deals with the identification and classification of so-called talented students. It focuses on the basic understanding of whom is considered talented and belonging to the target group for talent class activities and on the 'unfolding' of talent among the students in the talent classes. In the analyses, we address the questions how students are selected for the talent classes, and what characterises the students in relation to social background and talent.[1]

First, we outline the selection procedure for entering the talent classes. We analyse how students come to be seen as qualified for a place in a talent class and how they are identified as being talented. The admission process serves as a first analytical step. It consisted of students' written applications, the content of which we analyse as having contributed to an initial screening and selection. In this selection process, the talent development project and the education system as such also stand as the students' prior points of reference. This means that the performativity and classificatory processes taking place in schools unfold as desired or prescribed appearances of social identity (Jeffrey and Troman 2011).

Then, we focus on the interviews with talent class students and analyse what talent in their experience implies and what these primary actors in the talent development project understand by talent more generally. Their perceptions appear to link to the framework of the talent development project and to the way and degree to which they see themselves as talents. Their self-concepts are the overarching views of themselves, which can be seen as a working compromise between the desired appearances and the imputed social identities; between the individual and the social

[1] Parts of this chapter were previously published in the articles Rasmussen, A. (2012). The use of talent classes to reproduce differentiated education. *Ethnography and Education*, 7(1), 93–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2012.661590 and Rasmussen, A. and Rasmussen, P. (2015). Conceptions of student talent in the context of talent development. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *28*(4), 476–495. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2014.916013

A. Rasmussen, C. Ydesen, *Cultivating Excellence in Education*, Educational Governance Research 12, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33354-6_5

(Jenkins 1996). Based on the students' interpretations and self-concepts, we outline some categories of qualities associated with the talent concept.

Drawing on the concepts of capital (Bourdieu 1997), we analyse the students' social backgrounds. Based on the social differences among them and on the earlier outlined categories of qualities; we construct four types of talents that we portray through students that differ in terms of capital resources and gender. By this, we illustrate that the talent concept has a different content and meaning for different students from different backgrounds. Social background is seen to have a decisive influence on the understanding and perception of students' own talent.

The construction of the typology of talent results from an empirical triangulation of data obtained from the observations, survey, and interviews and an analysis inspired by Bourdieu's reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In our interpretation of this approach, the first step is to locate the objective structures – the resources and backgrounds for joining the talent classes, and the second step is to integrate the expressions of the student experiences of the talent class in relation to school and other circumstances of their lives.

Application Statements

The students' written applications for admission to the talent classes showed different types of reasoning, e.g., *challenge, bridge building, community, study trip, parent and teacher encouragement*. There was a widespread tendency to use words from the selection criteria that appeared in the project application sent to the Ministry of Education. Many students used the term "major challenges" about their motivation for applying. In a way, it is not surprising that the students used this particular term, as it also occurred twice in the selection criteria mentioned in the application.

Thus, some students stated that they lacked challenges in the daily teaching, e.g.

- *"I feel that I do not have enough challenges at my school, and if this continues, I believe that it will hurt my desire to get involved."*
- *"Especially in scientific subjects and mathematics I have for some time not had the challenges that I would like to face, for example assignments and more substantial written tasks where I would have an opportunity to thoroughly get engaged in a certain field."*

Other students expressed a more general desire for major challenges, such as being "interested in learning more and looking for new challenges in class" and "hoping to be admitted and having more and bigger challenges, both academically and personally." Here the desire for challenges was not solely related to the professional standards at school and the level of the teaching, but also to the students' personal ambitions about something more or something different.

Some student answers reflected more strategic reasons:

- *"The project will provide new and exciting challenges and facilitate the transition from primary school to high school or other youth education programs."*
- *"It would also be an advantage for me to be able to prepare for high school as I have already decided to go to high school – and from there to higher education."*

In giving these reasons, the students regard the talent class as bridge building between primary school and high school. It is seen as a program that may facilitate the transition of the individual student, provide options or otherwise be an advantage in the student's further education.

There are also one or more personal or social reasons in the applications, such as "looking for bigger challenges and looking for friends who share the same interests in school which I have". Such social conditions as the desire to meet like-minded young people and form new communities are also some of the things that the students choose retrospectively (in the interviews) to justify their participation:

- *"I am not sure; I probably also just wanted to meet some people who shared my interests (…)."*
- *"Well, more challenges and trying something new. So, I am very open to new things and getting out of the old framework and meeting new people. It just sounded kind of overall exciting."*

In sum, however, it is a tendency that the most widely used formulations in the applications are close to the formulated selection criteria. This is to a particular extent illustrated in the example with "major challenges". When the students or their parents – who in some cases are the ones who wrote the application – motivate their application by a lack of challenges in primary school, it should also be seen in the given context. The application was thus designed to provide for the fact that there would be a selection process where the parties have an interest in indicating that they are among the best within their field, which might for example be done by creating a distance to the field.

Admission Tests and Self-Selection

Prior to the admission tests, the request for written applications had involved a high degree of self-selection among the students. In one way or the other, the students had to decide whether they could even identify with the talent development project and considered it worthwhile to apply. As it appears from applications, they might have had assistance in this process by parents or teachers.

The target groups of parents and teachers of next year's eighth- and ninth-grade students had been informed of the project by their school, which had received a letter describing the project from the project steering group. The local school politician and principal of the upper secondary school had signed this information letter,

which was addressed to "all parents and students in the coming eighth and ninth grades in the Municipality". It was then up to the students or their parents to submit a written application to an admission committee comprised of the school management and the teachers involved in the talent development project. Selected students (based on their application) were meant to participate in an interview conducted by the admission committee. The committee would then decide who would be offered a place in the project.

However, with more than 90 applicants, admission interviews became too overwhelming a task, and the admission committee instead decided to conduct talent development admission tests. The students who had already applied were invited to an introductory meeting at the upper secondary school. They were informed that the admission tests would take place the following Friday after school hours from 4 to 8 p.m., and the future talent students would be selected on the basis of the admission tests only. It was stressed that admission tests were "considered the most objective basis".

The admission tests were conducted as planned and consisted of written tests in the following subjects: Danish: 60 min, mathematics: 60 min, physics/chemistry: 30 min, biology: 30 min and English: 15 min. Except for the English test, all tests had previously been used at the GCSE examination. In the English test, the students had to substantiate in English why they were applying for admission to a talent class. Out of the original 91 applicants, 66 students completed the admission tests and 32 were admitted: 18 students for the ninth-grade talent class and 14 students for the eighth-grade talent class. The students who had not turned up for the admission tests were asked to clarify in writing why they did not want to participate after all. Most explained that they would not be able to participate Tuesday afternoons due to leisure activities.

Of the 66 participants in the admission tests, 35 were girls and 31 were boys. Slightly more girls than boys applied for admission to the ninth-grade talent class: 17 girls and 13 boys. 18 girls and 18 boys applied for admission to the eighth-grade talent class. The 18 students who were accepted in the ninth-grade talent class counted 10 girls and 8 boys, while the gender distribution of students in the eighth-grade group was equal with seven girls and seven boys. The original group of 91 applicants represented 18 schools from all over the municipality, but most came from the municipality's main town and schools located here. The admission process still resulted in some polarization, as the accepted students represented a total of 10 schools in the municipality of which five were located in the main town. 19 students came from this town, and the remaining 13 students came from schools outside the main town. Thus, the share of students coming from the town was larger than the share that came from the countryside, but gender distribution among the students was almost equal.

For the second year's talent class project, there was no admission test. As the number of applicants did not exceed the number of places available, all students who applied were accepted for one of the talent classes. Like in the previous year however, it was anticipated in the project plan that they had in one way or the other been encouraged to apply by one of the teachers at their home schools.

Self-Concept of Talent

In research interviews, students gave a slightly more varied representation of their reasons for participating than in the written applications. This is naturally related to the reflective process that takes place in the interview situation when they reconstruct and consider what made them apply. Some respond broadly that they viewed the talent class as an opportunity for new experiences, like this answer:

> *(…) You could attend an information meeting and hear how it would take place and stuff like that. And when we got there, it sounded interesting. It was just something that had to be tested to see what it was, and then we were also going to London. We also got information about that, how it would take place and such things. We are allowed to try a little bit of everything.* (Talent class student)

Another student mentioned in the same spirit that it was the trip to London that was attractive. The talent class was marketed and seen as an opportunity for exciting experiences, including a study trip to London. Other students explained that they participated because the school or their parents encouraged them to apply.

There are different examples that the parents had a decisive impact on their children's knowledge about and interest in the project. A student said:

> *My dad, well, he is a member of the school board, so he came home with a paper which they were going to distribute some days later. So, he showed it to me and said jokingly – I think – if I didn't think it was exactly my cup of tea. So, I read it and just really felt great about the idea and thought it was just up my alley. When the paper was distributed a week later or so, I immediately applied.* (Talent class student)

As the example illustrates, the parents' support is of great importance in several aspects: the student discovered the offer, was inspired to sign up and convinced to participate. In several cases, the parents wrote the application. In these cases, the motivation is mostly described as the student lacking challenges or standing out as the best in his class.

However, most students emphasize they wanted to participate in the talent class. The parents have been a contributing and, in some cases, a decisive factor in the decision. One student summarizes his decision to participate as follows:

> *It was probably a lack of challenges and I wanted to prove to myself if I was good. That is, grades … that is one thing … to prove to yourself that it is not just a matter of a grade on a piece of paper. I am kind of hoping a bit for that. (…) Especially, my dad, he is very competitive, so he was just like … He wanted me to do it, thought I should try. And he also believed it would be good for me.* (Talent class student)

On one hand, the student wanted to prove to himself that he could do it. On the other hand, he acknowledges that the father is (also) very competitive, so maybe he is trying to prove something to *him*. In a somewhat similar situation, a girl justifies her application as follows:

> *In the beginning, I actually did not really feel like it. But then I thought, well, it might be fun just to try and see if I could be admitted. And then I talked to my mom about it, and then I applied.* (Talent class student)

From a somewhat reluctant position, the girl decides to go for it and apply for the talent class. It seems that the competitive element of 'trying out' is also a driving force, which entails that she can prove (to herself) that she can.

Like the parents, the students' teachers or schools may have been the external driving force and in some cases the decisive factor that made a student apply for admission to the talent class. The following statements demonstrate this point:

- *"It was … We received that slip of paper and then there was a teacher from the class next door, who also told me to apply. And my parents told me the same thing. (…) They thought it was great, that it was just what I needed, to have some more challenges at my school and maybe feel better about going to school again."*
- *"Well, so … naturally the teachers … When this new thing about the talent class came up, they pretty much encouraged me to do it. So I actually think they have done pretty well trying to get us to attend and stuff like that – those who wanted to."*

The school's support may also have been decisive for the student's decision to apply. In the above case, where one or more teachers encouraged the students to apply, this is given as an essential reason.

Talent Is Relative to Context

In evaluation research interviews students from the talent classes were asked: "How would you define talent?" In principle, it is a very open question, but it was asked in connection with the students' participation in a talent class and during interviews that took place at the school. It is therefore not surprising that almost all answers focus on talent in an educational context. The answers are often brief, possibly because the question was perceived as abstract.

Some students define talent as an indication that the talented person is smarter than most others within some disciplines. Here are some examples:

- *"I think mostly about something you are good at, that is, something you are better at than anything else (…) yes, something you are better at than others (…) I also believe that essentially talents are about something that you are simply interested in and where you want to go in-depth …"*
- *"It sounds kind of sports-related I think, but overall, yes, someone who is at a slightly higher level than 'average', that's how it is, and then class, yes, a class for those who are a little above average."*

Several students define talent as something relative. In the first statement, talent is understood as something definite, like "you are better at something than something else", meaning something the individual masters better than something else. However, it is also seen relative to other people's competences within the discipline, as you have to be "better than others".

In the second statement, talent is also defined in relation to others (students) and classes, where it is considered crucial to be "above average". Thus, the use of the term

"talent" is also connected to other things that you master, what others master, and what in certain contexts is considered average. *Whether*, *what* and *when* something or someone is considered a talent depends, to a great extent, on contexts and relations.

When talent is defined as being a little better than the majority, it raises the question whether and how much the talented students stand out compared to other students. They were therefore explicitly asked if they feel different from students in their regular class or school. The students who commented on this found the differences to be very minor. Some students point out that talent is not reserved for specific individuals, but that "*It is someone who is better than others at something, or not necessarily better, but can become better than others because it [talent, ed.] is something that can be trained.*"

These statements imply that talent is not an exclusive quality. You do not necessarily stand out by being better than others in a discipline, but you can become better than others through training. Talent is equated with any capability that can be trained – also in disciplines that are not academic. However, the students indicate that in the actual interaction with other students at the regular school, they do not experience big differences.

In summary, the various statements emphasize that talent is a relative quality that may be developed. Whether or not someone in a certain context is perceived as talented thus depends on the capabilities others in the same context possess (see Philipson and McCann 2007, p. 479). The perception of talent as *something that can be developed* emphasizes that it should be seen as a potential rather than an already completed accomplishment.

Talent as an expression of being or becoming better than most people does not say anything about the qualities that are a condition for this extra capability or the acquisition of it. However, some students point out such qualities, which we have grouped into different categories below.

Potentials or Performances

In the following statements, the students discuss possible preconditions for talent:

- *"… it is those who can figure things out and put the time into doing things."*
- *"It is probably somebody who is smart and also wants to learn stuff, or at least that is what we want to do."*
- *"… Want to try a bit harder, challenge ourselves a bit more."*
- *"Talent, well, the first time I heard about it, it had something to do with good students and something about ambitions to really develop someone."*

In these statements, a precondition for talent is being particularly interested in and willing to devote effort and time to something. As in previous statements, talent is pointed out as something that requires an effort to develop, which is in accordance with a developmental approach (Feldhusen 1998).

In the last statements, it is difficult to pinpoint whether the student is expressing his own or others' opinion. In other statements, some students more explicitly distinguish between common perceptions of talent and their own perceptions. This is further discussed below.

Another type of quality is expressed as the ease with which the talented person performs. Only a couple of students mention this type of quality, but it appears when they describe their own talent.

- *"Talent … it is probably that things come easy, that things come kind of naturally, that you do not have to think a lot about it, but it is easy to understand."*
- *"… it is about people who have the ability to develop quickly and well and move forward, get a good future or something like that".*

Talent as an expression of finding "things easy" suggests something naturally inherent rather than something cultivated. At any rate, it is not associated with lengthy toil and trouble because it is also a prerequisite that you do not have to "think so much about it" and "can develop very quickly". The last statement also indicates that talent is associated with a good future.

As mentioned, most of the students will naturally speak about talent in an educational context. Some explicitly mention that it is about talent for the kind of knowledge and activities that are associated with school.

- *"Actually, I believe that it is for students who have more of an academic interest or something like that."*
- *"Well, it shows that you so to speak enjoy being taught and having these extra four lessons after school."*

However, a single student also points out that talent may be defined in many different contexts.

> *I'm not sure – it is probably that you have something that you are somehow good at, and that may be anything from handball to school work to home sciences … I believe it may be all of that.*

The most common understanding among the students is that talent is an indication that you are a little better than the majority, that talent is seen as an interest, commitment and effort and that talent is especially displayed at school.

The students were also asked to describe their own talents. In some cases, the talent class was mentioned in the question, but even when it was not, most students instinctively understood that it was about the qualities that put them in the talent class. Most answers therefore include references to different school subjects. Many students hesitate to "praise themselves", but their responses were more telling than the answers to the general question of talent perception.

The students' descriptions of their own qualities include, as above, special interest and effort, and "finding it easy".

Talent understood as a special "interest and effort" is illustrated by the following statement.

> *Well … that's a good question, my talent … I am not sure … It has something to do with work ethics, I believe … that I may be willing to make an extra effort when I need to work and am willing to spend more time on school work as I am doing now, more that almost everyone else (…) When you look at it in terms of grades you can see that it is often reflected in the grades how much time people use, and how much it means to people if they want to be good at it or not* ….(Talent class student)

Talent understood as "finding it easy" was mentioned only by one student in connection with the general question regarding the talent concept, however, in the description of their own talent, this type of talent is seen in several students.

- *"I don't know, I am just able to figure everything out, or many things (…) Yes, I would say that something with numbers, that's what I am best at."*
- *"I mostly applied just because I thought that it is easy for me to go to school. I do not mean to say that I have a special talent. But I think that what we did at primary school, that was easy for me, and then I thought that it might present some new challenges …"*
- *"The lessons seem very easy here [at the primary school], it is really no problem, so, well, it just comes easy to me."*

The two categories of talent that are primarily conditioned on "interest and effort" or "finding it easy" may also be summed up as a *development potential* and an *easily accessible accomplishment* or *performance*. In the first case, emphasis is on talent as a potential that depends on an effort – a learning achievement – in order to develop. In the second case, emphasis is on talent as an accomplishment or performance that comes easily and therefore may seem as a natural gift. In this way, the categories applied by the students seem to follow the disputes of psychology of considering talent as a matter of nurture or nature (Feldhusen 1998; Winstanley 2004).

School Positive Values

In the description of their own talent, almost all students refer to one or more school subjects at which they excel. These references fall into two fairly equal groups. The first group consists of students who only or primarily indicate that they are good at mathematics. The second group consists of students who indicate that they are good at a wide range of subjects and at schoolwork in general. Below are two statements from each group:

- *"What I myself believe I am best at is mathematics, but academically I do pretty well also in the other subjects."*
- *"I believe that somehow I have only been able to attend due to the mathematics … that is the only thing I am kind of really good at. But when you come here, you actually find out that you are able to do a lot of other things (…)."*

Both students emphasize that while mathematics is their special interest and strength, the teaching in the talent class benefits them more broadly.

- *"Well, I am not sure if it is true that I am a lot better than the others. But I believe that I do very well in most subjects, actually. You might say that at least there is no subject where I am behind (…) there is really no subject that I hate."*
- *"I have always been good at the academic subjects and things like that (…) I have always been pretty good kind of all-round, but I do best in the scientific subjects and things like Danish and English (…) It has just always … things have always come easy to me."*

Several other students refer to the school's ratings and grades if they are asked how they became aware of their talent.

Although almost all students describe their own qualities in relation to specific school subjects, a few students emphasize other types of qualities, i.e., more general competences in relation to the school and competences in completely different fields.

> *Well, I am not sure … socially for instance (…) it has always been easy for me to be part of groups and to function socially when I'm introduced to a new group of people, and it has also worked smoothly in this talent class.*

Reservations About Talent

> *I am not that pleased with myself, but I am good at horseback riding. (…) But I am not sure if it is kind of a direct talent, because it is more of a broad talent that extends to several subjects …*

The comment that the student is not "that pleased with herself" is an example of the reservations that many of the students have about describing their own positive qualities.

Many of the students distinguished more or less clearly between broad perceptions and their own perceptions of talent. Common perceptions of talent are found in their surroundings – family, friends, school, mass media – and in themselves, but participation in the talent project has made them question whether this broad talent concept applies to them. Some of the students mention this and have reservations about this use of the talent concept, like this one:

> *Well, actually I believe that it is described a bit wrong because I feel a little bad that it is called 'talent'. It makes me feel – when other people hear it – that I'm somehow a little better than them. Actually, I believe that it should be used about students who have a more academic interest or something like that. (…) Yes, and then they write articles about 'the smart children'. That makes me feel totally … I find it kind of embarrassing because I don't feel it is that way. At least not in connection with myself (…) No, well … it is not that I feel stupid, but … None of us are totally 'brainy' children. So it is more about the things that interest you, and then I somehow feel like we are better than everyone else just because we do it, and then this thing about 'the smart children'…* (Talent class student)

This student refers to the fact that the common perceptions of talent contain some stereotypes that she would rather not be identified with. She would prefer not to be perceived as a "smart child", as "brainy" or as someone who feels that she is

better than others because she attends a talent class. She would risk distancing herself from the community with others, perhaps especially her regular friends and classmates.

Danish culture and values have a particularly strong emphasis on equality and community. Reference is often made to the Law of Jante (see Chap. 4), which allegedly makes it more difficult to recognize outstanding accomplishments and persons. According to Jenkins (2012) this observation has appeared as a general theme that nobody should get above themselves, which in the Law of Jante can be summed up as 'Do not get too big for your boots… if you do we will cut you down to size' (p. 186).

Also, in this life stage (the end of primary school), the community offered by groups of friends is of pivotal importance to young people. Adolescents are personally and culturally becoming independent from their parents, and fellowship with other young people plays a central role. They are also heading for differentiation, for example different choices of youth education. Students who are associated with the talent concept risk expressing some distance to their existing youth community, and they do not want that:

> *Yes, well, I believe that it sounds a little too … how to say it … distinguished, or what can you say? I don't like telling the others that I am attending a talent class because then they will think: 'well, ok, that kind of person!'* (Talent class student)

The students' reservations about the current talent concept in particular relate to their experiences from the participation in the talent class. They have discovered that neither they nor the other students in the talent class correspond to any stereotype images of "talents".

> *Well, in the beginning it was kind of very nerdy I thought when I first heard about this talent class. (…) But it is not that way at all when you actually meet the people. Then it is not that way at all, and then you realize that talent is a totally different way to see it, that it is about those who can figure things out and are willing to spend time doing things.* (Talent class student)

Some students mention that they think the project should have a different name. However, the name *is* talent class, and therefore they have developed strategies to refer to the project when they are together with their classmates on a daily basis:

- *"If I have to talk about it to someone then I am not going to say: 'that talent project', then I say: 'at the high school' or something like that because I am feeling a bit …"*
- *"Yes, well, sometimes people ask 'if we are those kids from the talent class' or 'Are you those nerds?' So, it has turned into kind of a joke for us to call ourselves the nerds. Once in a while, when we have a social event night, we will say: 'We are going to hang out with the nerds tonight'. We kind of tease each other that way."*
- *"We have actually discussed it in the talent class and at some camps. It is a bit like when you say it during class, then it is understood a bit negatively, as if you are better than the others and stuff like that. And we thought that was annoying (…) so we got used to saying: 'well, I'll be over at the high school or something like that (…)."*

None of these statements and none of the impressions from the observations indicate that the students perceive this as a major problem. It is a dilemma that they detect and then develop coping strategies. Most of them appeared to have a good framework in the groups of friends at their regular school and at the same time appreciated their participation in the talent class.

Resources and Background of the Talent Class Students

The social background conditions of the talent class students were generally more privileged than the conditions for peer students on a national scale in Denmark. The education levels of the talent class students' parents in a local (same region) comparative perspective show that compared with the equivalent peer group in the region, the parents of talent class students generally had more years of education. The percentage of parents with vocational education was lower (25% of the talent class parents as compared to 47% of the equivalent peer group), whereas the percentages with a higher education (especially long) were much higher (10%, 30%, and 29% of the talent class parents versus 5%, 14%, and 4% of the peer group). Also, in relation to their economic situation, the majority represented stable conditions with one family owner-houses, and many of them owning high positions of employment.

In terms of education, the talent class students thus proved to be a group with relatively high cultural capital. Linking talent to the concept of cultural capital is in line with Bourdieu, who contends that talent is the product of an investment of time and cultural capital in an embodied state. The work of acquiring this is work on oneself (self-improvement), which is an effort that presupposes personal investment and can be, 'easily accumulated only for the off-spring of families endowed with strong cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1997, p. 49). Talent is, thus, not mainly a question of being gifted with psychological qualities such as independence and reflexivity or of being motivated to invest time and effort; it is a question of having access to a set of social and cultural resources, having learned to mobilise these and being in a setting where such mobilisation is possible.

The acquisition of other types of cultural capital than education takes place in arenas outside of school but can be mobilised within the school setting. The talent class students had acquired such additional cultural capital, as they typically attended many after-school activities, including sports, scouting and music. Some of them were engaged in organised music or sports activities at a highly competitive level. Such activities seem to resemble the competitive endeavours applied to their schoolwork to gain and maintain superior positions at school. In that way, social position, as shaped by the possession of social capital, is seen to shape the contours of the students' daily life and thus provide them with social advantages in their texture of school socialisation.

On the same note, Annette Lareau (2000, 2011) contends that childhood experiences are likely to differ in the potential advantages they offer in the long-range process of social stratification. In her studies, comparing middle-class and working-

class children, she found that the middle-class children through their many and varied leisure-time activities had been in a wider variety of situations, often with more opportunities to perform and gain experience and practice, which provided them with different repertoires to draw on as they moved into other spheres of life.

Classification of Talent Relative to Resources

On the basis of the considerations students (and teachers) apply to talent, four types of talent can be constructed, the *distinguished* talent, representing students whom the teachers point to as special talents; the *quiet* talent, representing students who are exclusively interested in one particular thing or field; the *versatile* talent, representing students who manage to embrace interests in school and social life and thus appear as outgoing and socially active; and finally the *industrious* talent, representing students who are goal-oriented and work to acquire a high position in a specific area.

In the following type descriptions, it is important to remember that the individual type of talent arises from a typology. It represents an analytical construction and does not complete the picture of a particular student. Nevertheless, we have chosen to describe the types of talents with reference to specific students (in anonymized form), as we wish to portray the type as a human being in its social entirety and not just in relation to the concept of talent. This does not mean that the talented student is essentially equal to a particular type of talent. On the contrary, the individual student will probably be able to identify and be identified with several of the mentioned types, which may overlap.

Here is a description of the individual type, finalised with a summary of the characteristics of the individual types, i.e. a further development of the theoretical construction of the four different types of talents.

The Distinguished Talent

In the following, we exemplify the distinguished student through Gertrud, who grew up as an only child in a family with plenty of resources. Her parents have high occupational status and academic educations, and her leisure time activities include scouting and modern dance at competition level.

Gertrud has always done remarkably well at school, which has been noticed by her teachers, as well as by herself, stating that,

> *I've always been good at the school subjects generally. I've always been very good at them generally, but I'm doing best in natural sciences and subjects like Danish and English.* (Talent class student, Gertrud)

As displayed in this statement, Gertrud has a sense of naturalness in connection to the school subjects. This may be interpreted as a result of an unusual level of potential or giftedness, which she probably possesses. But it is also very probable

that her family's cultural capital has helped her develop a habitus relevant to excellence in educational settings. The notion of 'always' indicates that she has had an advantage already from an early age in relation to school.

She tells us that she has attended the same school throughout her life, which is thus characterised by stability. In her reflections on school life, she draws a rather positive picture, describing that there is quite a big variety of people – "from someone who absolutely can't work it out to someone who's really good at it; it's not that someone is being bullied because they're either clever or not clever. There's room for everyone".

Her relations with schoolmates appear to be very positive. She has no experiences of exclusion, which may be due to her natural mode of excellence and not having to compete. For Gertrud, competition connects with another sphere, the one of modern dance, which however still might give her an advantage in school. Thus, the flair for competition and performance that follows from a concerted cultivation of such leisure time activities appears to transmit to her a differential school advantage (Lareau 2011).

In the main, the distinguished talents perceived themselves and were perceived as generally proficient in school – in the humanities as well as the natural sciences. Thus, they did not doubt their own talent and explained their talent as finding things easy or being quick to learn in school. In addition to having a talent for school, they seemed to have a lot of energy to orient themselves broadly outside the school – pursuing leisure activities and looking for non-academic challenges. They came from homes with abundant resources in terms of knowledge (education) and social status, and their relationship with the school and their friends appeared straightforward and uncomplicated. They indicated that they knew there are big differences in the students' competences at school, but that they, despite their own academic merits, found it easy to socialize and communicate with other students who did not possess these qualities. Even though they did not feel excluded from their primary school communities, they experienced the talent class community as much more socially enriching than the school because they were with likeminded people in the talent class.

For the distinguished talents, talent appears to be rather inherent: They have simply always had a talent for the academic field, for the school, and they do not consider that strange.

The Quiet Talent

Ida represents the type we call the quiet student. She comes from a family of parents and two children, of whom she is the older. Her parents have long and middle-range higher education and both work in health care, which Ida also is aiming for. She expects to pursue education and training as a veterinarian or a medical doctor. In

addition to school and participation in the talent class activities, she is active in sports and has a leisure time job, which keeps her busy most days of the week. She stands out as someone who is 'silencing' herself as talented, by saying,

> *Well I don't know whether I'm decisively talented. But I really like science subjects, I think they are fun and feel that I understand them better than the linguistic subjects.* (Talent class student, Ida)

She adds that she does not regard herself as different from her classmates, as "we're all talented – it's just in different ways." She appears modest about her own 'talents' and downplays that she is doing well at school, perhaps to avoid distancing herself from her classmates and confirm her belonging to the community of students in her ordinary class.

On the reasons for her participation in the talent class, she comments, "I was probably the one who had the time and interest". Her approach to talent is that it should not turn you into someone special that makes you stand out from all the others. When further commenting on her decision to participate in the talent class, it also seems very important for her that she is not on her own.

It generally appears important to Ida that she does not stand out and has to do things on her own. She is very aware of doing things as part of a group and in this way emphasises the social element in a learning identity. This becomes legitimate by the social representation of school peers (cf. Osborn 2003, p. 149). This kind of social learner identity leads students to emphasise being 'interested' in a subject rather than being an outstanding student, has been noticed as common among Danish students, because the national culture is claimed to have a strong egalitarian dimension (Osborn 2003, p. 173–74).

Generally, the quiet talents were reluctant to describe themselves as talented. They came from average families in terms of education (medium term educations) and status (wage earners). They did not consider their talent as particularly important; they did not regard themselves as outright talents and they did not express to believe that they were more talented than their fellow students at school. Either they had a strong urge to not stand out from the crowd and therefore played down their talent for school – or for any of the school subjects – or they ascribed a possible experience of being different from their classmates to things that were not purely school-related. They expressed a strong interest in certain school subjects, but did not generally regard themselves as talented, rather as oriented towards certain disciplines rather than others. They saw talent as an enjoyable interest in school and ascribed this interest to the school itself or the social communities they were or had been part of. It was important for them to identify with their teachers (that is, teachers of the same gender) and classmates (common interests) to be able to maintain their interest in the school.

In many ways, the quiet talent was driven by social factors and expressed the belief that the social environment is very important for their own talent development.

The Versatile Talent

The boy Mikkel is our example of the versatile student, who is characterised by moving within a large social circle outside of school. His 'talents' take several directions, of which "being good at writing assignments in school and playing football at a fairly high level" he considers the most important.

Mikkel comes from a large family comprising father, mother and four children, of whom he is the second oldest. The parents have middle-range higher education as nurse and teacher, have managerial positions in the fields of health and education, and are politically and socially involved in community affairs. His father was very active in applying for and setting up the talent class activities, which is an example of the high amount of social capital in this type of family.

While in his ordinary school life he has had an experience of being considered a 'nerd', the talent class has meant more recognition of his interest in school as,

> *(…), it's accepted that I'm into school work. Where football among the talent students is just a minor thing, it's seen as the prestigious thing in my normal class. (…) But as I see it, it helps me so that I can work with those students too, because they're the 'football types'. I play football with five or six of them, and I'm also part of that environment, so I'm used to hanging out with those types too.* (Talent class student, Mikkel)

Although he points out that he can talk with 'those types' too, the football team sometimes may find it hard to accept his talent class activities because moving between the different spheres of football and school and giving priority to school does not leave him as much time for football training as his mates spend on it. Through this priority, he experiences a clash of interests, which however he has been able to handle by continuing to play football at a high level, which provides him with a privilege of social capital (Bourdieu 1997; Ball 2003). The provision of social capital is activated through participation in social networks, which displays the relationship between school and other spheres of life (work and leisure time) as a process and series of moves.

Overall, the versatile talents viewed talent as something that must be worked on and which they were willing to work on. They connected talent with originality (nerdiness) and the risk of being a nerd. They and their environment attached high prestige to being talented at school. They did not mind standing out as the most gifted at school, which they acknowledged and for which they found acknowledgement. Their background was especially characterized by social capital, as many of the parents were heavily engaged in the children's schooling and in other social or political activities. These talents were upstarts in the sense that they did not have parents with long academic educations. However, like their parents, they were broadly oriented and engaged in non-academic spheres, and they recognized the social importance of versatility, which could provide them with social capital in the sense of durable networks of institutionalised relationships of mutual recognition (Bourdieu 1997, p. 51). For instance, they practiced sports, maybe even at elite level, music or other leisure activities, but there was no doubt for them that school also had top priority.

The versatile talent was aware of the importance of being broadly oriented and simultaneously completing a high-level education to achieve a good position in society.

The Industrious Talent

Our example of the industrious student is Khaled, who came to Denmark as a refugee some 8 years ago. His family includes his mother (his father has passed away) and three children, of whom he is the middle child. Besides school and talent class activities, he has a leisure time job, plays football, badminton, does weight lifting, swims, and enjoys the company of friends and family.

He tells us about his 'talents' that,

> *I've always experienced mathematics as the subject that I was particularly good at. But now that we're being graded, I've noticed that I'm at almost the same [high] level in all subjects (…).* (Talent class student, Khaled)

It is very much a matter of doing well in school, which means performing well and getting high grades.

From his classmates he has experienced both positive and negative reactions to his talent and to the talent class. He reckons that most of his "real friends" "are happy about it". But he also experiences jealousy. "But that's rare and I'm also quite indifferent to it," he says. Although he does not express that he feels lonely in class, where he finds several school minded students like himself with whom he can and prefers to associate.

He describes it as a somewhat negative experience to come from another country and have a non-Danish background. He experiences that every time he is introduced to new persons, they look at the colour of his skin, his hair, and his eyes and they build a barrier and look at him in a negative way. His strategy is to turn it into something positive by "trying his best to make a good impression, so that their first hand impression may change".

Khaled experiences that being a talented student demands an effort that presupposes a personal cost (Bourdieu 1997). His accumulation of educational capital entails the obstacles that follow from arriving as a refugee and not speaking the native language from the outset. He still finds that he must struggle against prejudices about his 'non-Danish' appearance, and he prioritises an identity as a successful learner even though it may limit relations with part of the peer group in his daily class.

In the main, the industrious talents strived for higher educations and higher social positions than their parents. Their parents did not have long educations, and therefore to them school stood as a meeting place of different socio-cultural worlds. However, their cultural background (more peripheral compared to the school's dominant culture) did not lower their school ambitions. On the contrary, many of them aimed at and targeted specific educations and careers and were – in their instrumental behav-

iour, using education as a deliberate strategy for social mobility – guided by a desire to advance up socially and achieve good positions and better than those of their parents. This means that from this position, an element of deprivation was associated with the pursuit of the talent. You renounce something in your roots or in yourself, you compete with the others (and yourself) and you alienate some people. You must fight to not be knocked out by loneliness or opposition from others. Thus, the industrious talent also appeared to have the ability to give things up.[2] Competition and criticism appeared to be essential components of the aspirations of this type of talent, for which the school was seen as the most important guarantor.

The industrious talent was acutely aware that talent did not come by itself but was something that had to be worked on and fought for. It was equalled to and implying intense competition and accepted as part of the game in order to advance within the education system.

Concluding Discussion: The Talent Agenda and the Student Condition

The students tended to use comparative terms in their definitions of talent. They spoke of talent as "being a little better than others", "better than average", "knowing a bit more", "knowing a little more than the others," "being at a higher level than others" or "being above average". They compared themselves with other students in the class at their regular school. Talent thus emerged as a relative quality that implied and turned up in comparison with others. Many of the students had experienced their own talent (at school) by obtaining good grades in certain subjects or in general, which is an indication of the school's recognition of the talent.

There were also descriptions of talent such as "finding things easy" or "learning quickly". One student defined talent as being "naturally good at something without practicing a lot". Being curious, having a good memory, knowing the rules and having a logical sense are also qualities associated with talent. Such perceptions seem to indicate that talent is inherent, a natural quality. The phenomenon is of a biological nature as talent is perceived as innate.

Others described talent as something you are particularly good at compared to something else. It follows from this that everyone is good at something – you just need to find out what. Thus, expressing talent as a "special interest" in something does not necessarily mean that you are better than the others are. However, you pursue your interest in a certain field and by virtue of your interest, curiosity or inquisitive mind; you have the potential to develop a talent within that field. The students' descriptions of their own talents are especially within the framework of

[2] In a Danish novel, *The Quiet Girl*, the author *Peter Høeg* writes, *"Talent is the ability to give things up. He* (the main character in the novel, who is extremely talented) *had twenty-five years of experience in rightly choosing to part with things."*

the school and with reference to special school subjects, while some referred a wide range of subjects. Here, rather than inheritance (biology), there is an indirect emphasis on the environment, which is projected as essential to cultivate and work for the talent.

These considerations shift focus from accomplishments to potentials. The extent to which the students weigh one rather than the other depends on how they see their own talent. They thus relate differently to the talent concept, which is also true for their view on their own talent and its development.

The social background of the students in the talent classes was characterised by high amounts of social, cultural, especially educational, and economic capital (Bourdieu 1997). The parents generally had considerably higher levels of education than most people did in this provincial region. In comparison with other parents in the local area, fewer of the parents had a secondary vocational degree while more had higher education, especially university degrees. Some were very involved in social and political work, and generally, they took strong interest in the school. The families for the most part lived in owner-occupied housing, had high status occupations and thus belonged to social groups of high status in society (Nærvig Petersen and Nielsen 2008, p. 110). Additionally, the students were characterised by attending many after school activities such as music and sports.

Viewing the different understandings of talent in relation to social backgrounds, the analysis produced four overall types of talents: the distinguished talent, the quiet talent, the versatile talent and the industrious talent. The distinguished talent expresses an almost inherent talent and a feeling of always finding learning easy – it just seems natural. The quiet talent is primarily driven by being social and attaches great importance to the social conditions in connection with learning/talent development. The versatile talent is aware of the importance of being broadly oriented while pursuing education at a high level and thus achieving a good position in society. The industrious talent experienced talent as something that requires effort and struggle, for which reason this type stands out as particularly competitive.

In some ways, these perceptions reflect the way talent is discussed as well as the criteria and methods to identify talents are developed in psychology. They involve conceptual distinctions such as talented by nature versus nurture; genetic heritage versus social environment; one-dimensional versus multidimensional talent; and talent as judged by potential versus performance. However, adding a sociological perspective emphasises how they also relate to socio-economic background and circumstances – how the point of view depends on the viewpoint (Bourdieu 1999). The distinguished student, who is equipped with cultural capital and presents herself ‘comfortably’ in relation to talent, tends to describe and understand learning as something natural and innate that ‘has always come easy’. In direct contrast, the industrious student, who does not have the same ‘natural’ or rather socially hereditary conditions for education, and whose approach to talent is less subtle (see also Ulriksen et al. 2009), tends to describe his talent as a ‘special interest’ and as achievements that do not come easy but demand hard work, effort, and social support.

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Chapter 6
Teaching in the Talent Classes

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the teaching in the talent classes based on different pedagogical dimensions: the practical and didactic planning and execution of the talent classes and the teaching in the classes. Theoretically, we draw on Basil Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing to analyse the talent class activities.

Empirically, the analyses are based on fieldwork observations of lessons and other talent class activities, especially regarding student interactions and student roles vis-à-vis the teachers, and interviews with the students and teachers.

First, we describe the academic subjects and composition of students in the particular classes and analyse whom and what defined the academic content of the classes, which is a question of power and control relations in the teaching. That is, we focus on power relations *between* categories and control relations as legitimate forms of legitimation (Bernstein 2000, p. 99), including teaching methods and teaching activities and the extent to which the students had a voice – to which weak or strong framing was dominant.

Second, we compare the power and dominance relations to the relative social homogeneity of the talent classes, the habitus of the teachers, and their different prioritization of communication methods and content. In this connection, we consider the relation between teacher and student, and their mutual expectations to the teaching activities. Finally, we consider the participants' experiences from the talent programme in relation to everyday, regular practices in lower secondary and upper secondary school, including the political demands and tensions to which these institutions are subject.

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Academic Subjects and Groupings

The first year, the *two talent classes* covered the subjects of English, mathematics, biology and physics/chemistry. Both talent classes thus saw a combination of language and science subjects but the scope of the subjects differed between the two grades. In the eighth-grade talent class, language and science subjects weighed equally; in the ninth-grade talent class, science subjects were clearly prioritized over English.

In *the eighth-grade talent class*, all teaching was conducted by two teachers from the local lower secondary school but took place at the upper secondary school. The class counted 14 students, seven boys and seven girls, from nine different schools in the municipality, one of which was a private school, and one student came from a school in a different municipality.

In *the ninth-grade talent class*, teaching was divided between upper secondary school teachers (biology and mathematics) and lower secondary school teachers (physics/chemistry and English). The class counted 18 students; 10 girls and eight boys. Five of the students came from private schools, and the remaining from different lower secondary schools in the municipality.

The teaching in both grades had been scheduled for Tuesday afternoons from 3 to 6:30 pm and adopted a traditional teaching model *divided into separate subjects*. At the beginning of the academic year, the students were informed that they would be required to spend a few full Tuesdays on for example excursions, talent camps held during the weekend, and a 1-week trip to the UK towards the end of the course. Tuesday teaching of both classes took place at the upper secondary school, and weekend teaching took place at the local lower secondary school. Each class had four weekend camps.

The second year, the talent class project saw an academic differentiation and now comprised an *eighth-grade talent class in English*, a *ninth-grade commercial talent class*, and a *ninth-grade science talent class*.

The eighth-grade talent class in English was taught by two lower secondary school teachers. The teaching was organised under the auspices of the after school classes as one weekly afternoon teaching from 3.30 to 5 pm. The class comprised 25 students (22 girls and three boys). The students came from ten different lower secondary schools in the municipality. Even though the students had been recruited from so many different schools, as many as 11 students came from the same school. Furthermore, three students came from the same class at two other town schools, while two students came from a private school. The remaining six students came from six mainly rural schools.

The ninth-grade commercial talent class had English, philosophy, social science and marketing, and each lesson took place at HHX/EUC Nord (the commercial upper secondary school) on a weekly afternoon from 3.15 to 6.30 pm. The course ended with a study trip to Glasgow. The class comprised seven students – three boys and four girls – of which five came from the same school. The remaining two students also came from the same school; both were girls who had also participated in

the eighth-grade talent class the previous year. The class stands out from the other talent classes by being significantly smaller and by including students from only two schools. Much like the eighth-grade talent class in English, most of the students had been recruited from the same schools.

The ninth-grade science talent class was taught at both the general upper secondary school and the technical upper secondary school. At the upper secondary school, they had lessons in astronomy and biology conducted by one upper secondary school teacher and one lower secondary school teacher. The class had a total of four lessons with these teachers. At the technical upper secondary school, there were two teachers allocated to the class. Even though they had divided the lessons between them, both were often present at the same time, just as the lower secondary school teacher dropped by the technical upper secondary school a couple of times.

The science talent class comprised 21 students – seven girls and 14 boys. Three students came from other municipalities, and eight students had attended the eight-grade talent class the previous year. The class was a so-called "fusion class", as two science talent classes had originally been offered – one at the upper secondary school and one at the technical upper secondary school. But they were merged into one class to have an appropriate number of students, and the schools then took turns teaching the class. As most of the students had chosen the technical upper secondary school talent class, three of the modules were taught at the technical upper secondary school, and the remaining two modules at the upper secondary school. The class thus received instruction at two different schools from six different teachers (five upper secondary school teachers and one lower secondary school teacher who had also been affiliated to the project the previous year and was one of the leading forces with regard to the talent camps).

Socially, this class was more diverse than the other two second-year talent classes. The students behaved differently in class. There was a group of quiet students, who did not say much in class but focused on their laptops. Most of the quiet students had a partner for group work. In addition, there was a large group – almost half the class – of more vociferous students. They talked a lot, and they seemed to have a lot to share with one another – not just academically – and did so in a laughing and gesticulating manner, which indicated they had a lot in common. This group mainly comprised students who also participated the previous year and students who knew the "old students". The students in this group focused a lot on each other and on what the others were doing.

The second-year talent classes differed from the first-year classes with regard to both academic subjects and student composition. While both first-year classes included both language and science subjects, the second-year classes were divided into several "tracks", making the classes more specialized. At the same time, the recruitment and distribution of students in some ways had polarized, as they came from fewer schools and the gender composition was different from the previous year. There was thus a large majority of girls in the eighth-grade talent class in English and a majority of boys in the ninth-grade science talent class.

Curriculum and Teaching Methods

During the first year of the two talent classes, the lower secondary school teachers described the planning of their teaching as very much controlled by the students' wishes and needs. According to their descriptions, the content was planned with the help of the students, who were asked what they wanted to explore in depth. The upper secondary school teachers who taught the ninth-grade talent class also indicated that the students to a large extent helped choose the teaching material.

One of the upper secondary school teachers described how she initially presented various options and then discussed them with the students. The choice of teaching material is presented as a balancing act between adding to the lower secondary school curriculum and avoiding the upper secondary school curriculum. Also in other respects do the teachers describe their efforts to plan the teaching the "right" way as a balancing act. A second dimension to the difficult balancing act is that she did not believe in allowing students to make too many choices, "because they have limited knowledge" as to the subject and its opportunities.

The teaching principle in the eighth-grade talent class in English was that teacher and students had to speak English only, even when they did not know which words to use. After a joint start-up, the class was divided into two groups taught by different teachers; it went on like this:

> *One group goes over the homework (grammar exercise) for the day. A few students who have not done their homework give it a try. Wrong answers are corrected. Then the group is divided into three smaller subgroups, which work on a translation together. The second group is also divided into smaller groups. They each read a text and have to take on four different roles which must form the basis of their argumentation. All students appear confident and participate as well as they can.*
>
> *The teachers have introduced the rule that the students have to correct each other if they know that another student's pronunciation of a word is incorrect. This rule is practiced without problems. They adopt a pattern where one student reads aloud, and another student explains the text. They then discuss the text. The teacher moves from one group to the next, interfering with their work. It is not always a smooth process, and not all pronunciations are correct, but the students are dedicated and accept when mistakes are corrected.* (Observation notes)

The students were generally positive about the teaching and teachers. They said that the teachers had "chosen the texts carefully," that they "were more committed" and "have a good feel for what interests us." Such statements indicate that the teachers, when choosing the content, had succeeded in considering students' interests. The students had somehow been involved in choosing the texts they read in class.

> *The style of teaching in the ninth-grade commercial talent class appears to be rather traditional. The students either listen to the teacher present the day's topic or read the text for the day – aloud or quietly – before answering questions from the teacher. Sometimes, they work on questions based on a written text before "sharing" the answers with the rest of the class.* (Observation notes)

The teaching method was text-oriented and similar to most academic teaching in lower secondary school. Nevertheless, some of the students found this teaching method "a bit different", because "there are so few of us, and there is a teacher just

for us, and the texts are a bit more difficult". The teacher thus had more energy and time for the students because it was a small class. However, it had been challenging for the teacher to compile the academic content, as it had to explore topics in depth and be different from what the students would meet with if they would later apply to commercial upper secondary school.

The group of teachers in *the ninth-grade commercial talent class* had identified some topics that they addressed in English, philosophy, business economics and social science. Each lesson was shared by two subjects working together on the same topic, and the teachers took turns teaching the class.

The teaching in *the ninth-grade science talent class* was divided between the upper secondary school and the technical upper secondary school. Sometimes, this caused confusion when the students were not told where to go until the last minute. However, it was stressed that this structure made the content varied, and it was described as a "good combination". The teachers saw it as an advantage because it gave the students a chance to try both, giving them a better basis for deciding between upper secondary school and technical upper secondary school.

The teachers at the technical upper secondary school claimed to have a more practice- and project-oriented approach than goes for general upper secondary school teachers. Their ideal teaching method stood as a combination of blackboard teaching and group work, where it should be possible to ask questions, and the teaching should include practice. However, several students expressed mixed feelings about technical upper secondary school, which they found "too practice- and project-oriented". These students rather enjoyed the theoretical content, which they associated with general upper secondary school. But the very variation in locations may have provided the students with the appreciated combination of teacher control and student co-determination.

Pedagogic Models

The students emphasised that the talent class teaching was characterized by more tests than their regular teaching. They also indicated that they learned more from this form of teaching. Here are a few examples of what the students said about the test-oriented approach of the talent teaching:

- *"In biology, for example, we do tests, and we get a much better understanding of things by testing them and seeing what happens and things like that, instead of just reading a book and doing these written exercises, the answers to which can be found in a book. That is, we get a much better understanding of things this way."* (Student in ninth-grade talent class)
- *"We do tests instead of constantly being filled up with knowledge – like, just theoretical knowledge. Then we also try to prove the things we are told, because otherwise we could just say, 'Sure, that is probably true.' But we also see that they are true. And in English we talk to each other instead of just reading a lot of texts. We do that too, but we do new things."* (Student in eighth-grade talent class)

The students describe how the talent teaching had a practical in addition to a theoretical dimension, where they got to participate actively – either by doing tests in the science subjects or discussing texts in English. They preferred to be able to put together their knowledge through a form of self-activity rather than just be "filled up with knowledge", as students metaphorically described their ideal of teaching.

The students generally compared the talent teaching to their regular teaching, which they found characterized by fewer tests and less communication in English. Bookwork had a relatively larger presence in this teaching, possibly due to the larger time pressure typically found in lower secondary school. As one student points out, there was less time for the individual subjects in lower secondary school, for example biology would be taught in lessons of 45 min, while in the talent class two full hours had been devoted to the subject. This meant that teaching here followed a slow-paced and expensive *competence model*, not the inexpensive *performance model* generally found in lower secondary school (Bernstein 2000, p. 191ff).

The competence models are characterised by weak classification with regard to discourse, space, and time. The pedagogical discourse is expressed in various forms of projects and themes, where the students to a large extent have influence on selection, order, and pace. There are few specially defined pedagogical spaces and an absence of regulating demarcations limiting access and movement. The evaluation criteria of the teaching discourse tend to be implied and diffuse. The "pedagogical text" is the students themselves, which presupposes comprehension theory and teacher professionalism. The models are relatively expensive because becoming acquainted with the individual students and giving them feedback on their development (or lack hereof) is time-consuming.

The performance models are strongly classified with regard to discourse, space, and time. They build on a pedagogical discourse displayed in specialized topics (subjects), skills, and procedures, and whose form and function are clearly stated. While space and pedagogical practice are clearly marked and regulated, the students have limited room to build their own pedagogical space. The evaluation criteria must be explicit and specific to ensure that the students learn what constitutes a legitimate text and how to produce one. Evaluations lead to potential repair services and diagnostic theory, practice and critique. The regulation of events is eased by the "objectivity" of the performances, and evaluation of performance models may thus be relatively cheaper.

As goes for the talent classes, the total number of students in each class was significantly lower than in a normal lower secondary school class, which was another 'expensive element' of the competence model. This difference was self-evident when interviewing students at their regular schools: "There are only 13 students or so in the talent class, and my class here counts 24 students. So it is a pretty big difference, and you can tell" (Student in the eighth-grade talent class).

In several ways, the talent teaching thus offered the students different conditions for learning. They felt they played a more active role in the teaching compared to the more passive role in their regular classes. This may have been a result of the different structure where student activities took up a relatively larger share of the total teaching time. However, it should be stressed that the conditions of the talent class

with regard to planning were different, as it was not subject to a rigid framework of curricular and examination requirements. Further, the smaller talent classes ensured more time for the individual student.

Weak Framing

From the interviews, it became evident that the students considered the talent class less controlled by externally imposed demands than their regular teaching. It enabled them as students to make suggestions, not only as a ritual but as an example of actual co-determination concerning the content of the teaching. The fact that they had more time for what they were working on seemed to give the students a sense of freedom:

> *It is more free. We do not have to meet a deadline. We have plenty of time to do what we want to do within the themes and explore them in more detail. We do not need all those tests, and we do not really experience grade-grubbing. In fact, in the talent classes we are not concerned with each other's grades at all, I think. So it is, like, more free.* (Student in the ninth-grade talent class)

This student associates the fluid boundaries of the talent class with the lack of standardised tests and grades. It gives him the time to do what he wants to do, just as it frees up time to get carried away by one's desire to learn – and explore things in detail. Time and a slow pace seem vital to his desire and opportunity to learn. He described the teaching conditions in the talent class as very different from the lower secondary school, where the interview took place:

> *Here there is like a fixed plan for what we have to do when, and you cannot just hang around for a week and so on. So, there is little flexibility. There is a more laidback attitude in the talent class. If we fail to understand something, we will just revisit it next time, and that makes it more fun to participate in the talent class, well, going to school in general.* (Student in the ninth-grade talent class)

In the student's view, regular school teaching is characterized by time pressure and force and the talent class by less or no force. The related time and slow pace appear as main requirements for learning and indirectly express a preference for a pedagogical competence model over a performance model.

Given that the students had signed up for the talent classes voluntarily it was predefined as voluntary and free. This presupposes that the students actually participate voluntarily, which they all claimed to do. Interestingly, this initial voluntariness may have had far-reaching consequences for how the teaching was structured and was experienced as a success.

The students also considered the great commitment unfolded in the talent class, on the part of both teachers and students, was result of the voluntariness and related expectations. As they had signed up for the talent class voluntarily, the students were expected to be dedicated to the teaching activities, which again enhanced their experience of co-determination. Another implication of this statement was that stu-

dents could select and deselect content if it did not suit them. The teaching was thus built on mutually positive expectations for dedication, which in itself could cause the participants to become more dedicated. Thus, the pleasurable aspect becomes self-reinforcing.

Opposed to Strong Framing of Regular Schooling

The students typically compared the talent teaching to the teaching they were familiar with from lower secondary school, which precisely in the final grade focuses strongly on curriculum, tests, and grades. In this perspective, the talent class came across almost as an oasis, but also as a radically different space for learning, as focus was still on teaching and learning. The conditions here were different from what the students were used to, though. As evident from the students' statements, the weaker classification of boundaries gave them a sense of more intense learning.

The talent class teachers had different opinions about the weakly classified boundaries. The lower secondary school teachers primarily noted that the students showed more discipline with regard to the teaching, even though they were not to be examined in the subject. A teacher was thus impressed that the students showed up for class late in the afternoon after a full school day and "still put this much effort into it" even though there was no "final exam." Another lower secondary school teacher had chosen not to give the students homework because there was no final exam. He stressed that they were welcome to prepare for his classes but did not have to.

When the teaching, which the teachers above contrast with the talent classes, follows a fixed curriculum and tests, it can also be said to be characterized by strong classification and framing. The concepts of classification and frame thus work as analytical categories to identify dominant knowledge and its impact on the pedagogical practice or, in order words, to identify the existing pedagogical code (Bernstein 2000).

Classification refers to the indication of a boundary between fields and between school knowledge and everyday knowledge. Strong classification thus points to a clear separation of subjects and knowledge forms, while the opposite is true of weak classification.

Framing refers to the degree of control exercised, by teacher and students, over the communication in the pedagogical practice and can also be either strong or weak. This includes the order, pace, and evaluation of teaching activities, i.e., the options that are available to the teacher and students. Strong framing means that the students and the teacher are not in control of the pedagogical content (curriculum), order, pace, and evaluation, and weak framing implies more freedom and occurs when students and teachers have more control of these aspects.

Based on the concept of classification, Bernstein distinguishes between two general curriculum and knowledge codes, the *collection code* and the *integration code*. The first refers to a strongly classified curriculum and is oriented towards acquiring certain amounts of knowledge; the latter refers to a weakly classified curriculum and is focused on acquiring methods for the acquisition of knowledge. We return to these codes below.

The lower secondary school teachers quoted above consider it *unproblematic* that the teaching is weakly framed and not subjected to curricular and examination requirements. But they consider it remarkable that the students nevertheless attend the teaching, seem full of energy and prepared, and even do their homework, though they are not explicitly required to do so. Thus, there appears to be an implicit expectation that weak framing could affect motivation or discipline negatively, but does not.

The upper secondary school teachers saw the weak frames as more problematic. One suggested that it could cause disciplinary problems, because "it is not a subject in which they will be examined". On that basis, the teacher had felt a need to "rake the students over the coals and tell them that it is no fun if they cannot be bothered to commit to it. But they are busy doing all kind of things during class …" (interview with teacher). The other upper secondary school teacher outlined the same problem concerning the students' academic discipline, arguing that when the teaching lacks a goal, the social aspect of the talent class easily gets out of control. She said:

> *Well, I would have liked some goals, that some goals had been set from the beginning, so the students knew from the start which topics we would be covering.* (Upper secondary school teacher in the ninth-grade talent class)

As mentioned, the upper secondary school teachers also found that the students differed a lot in terms of level. This may be why they had difficulties identifying the students' interests and acting within the weak framing of the teaching. The upper secondary school teachers thus found it unsatisfactory that no clear goals had been set for the talent teaching. This appears connected with the curriculum-oriented culture of upper secondary education and their academic habitus and capital (Bourdieu 2005).

The students almost unanimously indicated that the teaching in the talent class went into more depth than teaching in their regular classes. For most students, the material was not completely new, but something they had already been in contact with during their regular classes. Thus, they had a distinct experience of learning more. Teaching in the talent class gave them a feeling of going behind things, of gaining background knowledge and reaching the bottom of the matter.

Pedagogic Reciprocity Between Teachers and Students

It seems obvious that the course for which the students had signed up voluntarily stimulated expectations of commitment on the part of both teachers and students. Several students indicated that the teachers were very committed to the talent teaching. As one student said:

> *The teachers are very committed, and it seems like they enjoy teaching a group of equally committed students. Of course I also know this from my own teachers that they find it is more interesting to work with someone who wants to do the work, and I expect the teachers here to be of the same opinion.* (Student from the ninth-grade talent class)

Another student noticed that a teacher had explicitly praised the talent classes as target group, *"because we are sometimes more committed than other classes." (Student from the eighth-grade talent class).*

As the examples show, the students notice the teachers' commitment and interest in them. They also reveal that the students considered themselves committed and someone "who wants to do the work", which placed the teacher in a privileged position.

One student described the interplay between teachers and students in this way:

> *The teachers really enjoy teaching us. It is great that they want to spend their time on us, want to do it, and teach us something. (…) The teacher is never angry with any of the students and things like that. So, the chemistry between the class and the teacher is much better, because the teacher enjoys teaching us. That is not always the case in an ordinary school. At least I do not think so.* (Student from the ninth-grade talent class)

This student argues that the absence of disciplinary problems in the talent class is one reason the teacher enjoys teaching them, which she personally appreciates. In this perspective, it is not a matter of course that the teacher enjoys teaching.

As the students imagined or heard, the teachers also had favourable impressions of them as students and the talent class teaching conditions, and for instance said,

> *What really characterizes the students is that you face a class that is fully motivated and concentrated to an extent you do not see elsewhere as a teacher. You may have highly motivated students, who are diligent and attentive, but never an entire class, and that really goes for this class. (…) When it's an entire class that is asking questions and wants more knowledge, then it demands significantly more of me, professionally, and I like that.* (Lower secondary school teacher in the eighth-grade talent class)

Such statements indicate that the lower secondary school teacher was used to much more varying commitment among his students. The diversity of students in lower secondary school implied more difficulties in motivating the students and that the teachers would not be challenged to the same extent within his academic domain. In the talent classes, he did not face the same disciplinary issues and therefore rather could feel professionally – as to subject knowledge – challenged.

From a Different Academic Point of View

The teachers who were usually teaching upper secondary school students took a slightly different view of the talent class students and teaching conditions. One of them said about the students:

> *They are definitely not as homogenous as I had expected. I had hoped and counted on them to be more homogenous, which would give you a group where each participant had an interest in the subject or in this project. I do believe they have an interest in the project, but that has just as much to do with it being a nice, positive environment. You have students who, if I were to characterize them by grouping them in upper secondary school programs, are definitely qualified for the hard science-technology or science study programs. Then we have students who are not especially qualified for these (…) Actually, I think this means that the few students whom I believe have a talent within my subject will be bored.* (Upper secondary school teacher in the ninth-grade talent class)

The upper secondary school teacher describes the students in the talent class in relation to the academic programs offered in upper secondary school. The students without science qualifications failed to live up to the teacher's expectations for talent. The other upper secondary school teacher said that she did not consider the students talents as such, but rather "a group of talented lower secondary school students about to move on." Much like the lower secondary school teachers, she saw it as a positive thing that they spent their spare time on more schooling. However, she did not find that they were more interested in schoolwork than the classes she was teaching in the upper secondary school.

The teachers thus viewed the talent class from different perspectives due to their different experiences from lower secondary school and upper secondary school. The lower secondary school teachers saw teaching the talent class a privileged and relatively rare situation, where they felt that they could concentrate on a shared interest in the subject in question. It was contrasting their everyday work at the lower secondary school, which was characterized by the need to teach in a wider didactic perspective. To the upper secondary school teachers, the talents class did not in the same way represent a *new situation* that enabled them to focus on the academic aspect exclusively. In that perspective, the talent class differed less from the upper secondary school teachers' curriculum-oriented culture (Gundem and Hopmann 2002).

Some teachers from lower secondary school also took an academic point of view to characterising the students; in this case those in the eighth-grade talent class:

> *The students we have here are talented but they are not equally talented, and I cannot say that we have seen any real talents; the number of lessons have been too few. But they are all pretty good at English. (…) They seem very independent and well-adapted, and as mentioned we have only had to correct one of them.* (Teacher in the talent class in English)

This teacher describes the students as being good at English, but hesitates to call them real talents; that would require more lessons, she argues. Whether that means that they have not received enough instruction in English to be considered "real talents", or that she does not know them well enough to say so, is unclear. The teacher also describes the students as independent and well adapted, which may seem contradictory. She probably means that they are independent in a way that allows them to pursue their own interests, while at the same time meeting the school's and the teacher's expectations.

Concluding Discussion: The Talent Agenda and the Practice of Teaching

The teachers in the talent classes have a sense of being selected for the talent teaching by virtue of their professional skills and interest. Similarly, talent students have been given the "seal of approval" by their own teachers and school management. They are not just proficient in the formalistic sense by virtue of grades and qualifications, but they are personally interested and have the energy to take on additional challenges.

What thus constitutes this teaching context is the fact that the teaching is *something special*. Both from a political and from a management point of view this teaching is considered as something significant – as it is also the case with the primary actors in the teaching. This appreciation among both students and teachers helps create a common understanding of teaching as something special, which in itself contributes to its significance.

Although there are high academic expectations for the content of the teaching, this is only casually described as the possibility of "digging deeper". What it means and how it is achieved is entrusted to the teachers and the students' joint actions. With a few exceptions, most of the teachers have experienced the challenge in relation to this responsibility as positive. They have thus been able to deal with subjects that they feel passionate about – including things like prolonged experiments, which they are usually not able to perform during the regular teaching. They are not bound by time and curriculum demands.

The academic content of the teaching has largely been organized and implemented based on the students' needs and interests. However, some teachers have seen it as a challenge to teach within this kind of vague framework. On the one hand, they regard it as a great privilege to teach a target group that shows interest and commitment. On the other hand, they express their concerns about largely basing the teaching on the wishes of the students. Thus, they point out that the vague framework may present problems to them both in terms of justifying what must be learned and in motivating the students.

For their part, the students have experienced teaching that is characterized by a much more distinct cohesion and totality than they are used to at school. They often talk enthusiastically about the practical and experimental approaches that they do not witness to the same extent in their regular school life. They experience the greater student involvement and activity that unfolds in the talent class as a more intense form of learning. At the same time, they acknowledge that the conditions for this type of teaching are not present at school, where there are for example totally different time constraints because a broad curriculum must be completed within a limited time. Conversely, the larger spread in the student qualifications here may make it necessary to allow more time for the same things and they may thus not be able to explore something in depth in the same manner.

Thus, there is a tendency for the students to see the framework for the regular teaching (fixed curriculum, tests and varying student qualifications) as a limitation to achieving quality in the daily schoolwork. In contrast, in relation to a vague framework, some teachers refer to the difficulties it may present in having to discipline less interested students.

Conversely, where the teaching has been characterized by a vague framework, it is predominantly characterized by a strong classification, that is, the teaching is very discipline-specific and there has been almost no teaching across disciplines. However, the many student activities and practical exercises point to the fact that a weak classification has also been practiced where there has been a softening of the boundaries between different forms of knowledge. In this regard, there is interesting differences in the teachers' assessments of talent, learning and knowledge which

seem strongly related to the place from where they have their teaching experiences. The upper secondary school teachers' assessments – in the form of highly discipline-specific perceptions of talent and knowledge – are thus a clear extension of the strong classification that applies to upper secondary school.

In other words, it is true for both students and teachers that their resources and strengths are seen as the point of departure and that they are socially recognized. An additional difference in relation to their general teaching is the stronger emphasis on social practice. This applies not just to the project description, but also to the associated financial allowances for teaching resources, however, only for the ninth grade.

In sum, the statements that apply to the students' teaching at their regular lower secondary school in relation to talent teaching, the latter is characterized by teachers and students being socially recognized as proficient and having extensive academic knowledge. In talent class, there was a positive focus on the students' (and teachers') resources; everyone was interested and wanted to learn and this desire was considered legitimate; there was an atmosphere of trust both in the teacher-student relationship and in the student-student relationship, there was real dialogue about academic issues, and last but not least, there was no fixed curriculum to be learned but weak framing and freedom to choose.

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Chapter 7
Policy Perceptions of Talent Activities Among Local Teachers

Introduction

In this chapter, we analyse and discuss views on talent development among school teachers from different public schools in the local municipal context. The empirical data include interviews with public school teachers who teach regular classes, that is, not talent classes, and who recommended the students for the talent classes. Thus, we aim to bring into the analysis the point from which they see the talent activities and how they become comprehensible and justified to the teachers (Bourdieu 1999, p. 615). We outline the substance in both their supportive and sceptical opinions of the talent classes, on what experiences this is based, and how this has led the teachers to very different views on the talent project. The teachers often refer to debates in local media and to their students' experiences. Finally, we discuss the discourses of public school teachers with those on talent development expressed in policy proposals on talent at the national level.

The chapter also draws on possibilities and limitations in terms of educational differentiation within the framework of the public school system, as demonstrated in analyses in Chap. 3. Regarding children with special needs, we discuss the nature of 'talented students', special needs and how such needs can be accommodated in or outside the framework of regular schooling. We sum up and discuss political conflicts between prioritisation of elite versus equality in the Danish public school, including pedagogic implications of a selective versus a comprehensive school system. We further discuss, how the public school's objectives – "to provide" the students with knowledge and skills, strengthen academic standards and the culture of evaluation – affect the framework of the school and the teaching for talent development.

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Support for Talent Development

The teachers presented in this section are positive about talent development. Each teacher and their background for commenting on the talent class are briefly introduced, and their statements are interpreted based on the relevant context.

JYTTE is a teacher at a medium-sized school with approx. 500 students in the principal town in the municipality. She is class teacher for Rasmus, an 8th-grade talent student, and she has several contacts with talent development. She has followed the debate about the talent project in the local paper, she is deputy chairwoman in a sports club for a sport that also has a talent team. In addition, her school has previously experimented with gathering "very talented children" in a special class because they "lacked social competence". JYTTE does not think this applies to the students in the current project. She describes Rasmus as an "incredibly nice student", and has heard from the math teacher that he is good at mathematics, but that several of his class mates are as good or better. She sums up her view of the talent class as follows:

> *Well, in my opinion the benefits outweigh the costs – maybe also because Rasmus' experience has been so positive. I know that there is a lot of debate about whether it's right to pick some students and do something special for them. But, I mean, just like you take students out of a class if they have problems with something, you can take them out of the class and do something extra at the other end of the scale.* (JYTTE)

JYTTE sees talent classes as a positive form of special education. In principle, she does not see it as being different from special education for students who have trouble keeping up in school. Just like they need extra help, she finds it OK to take students "at the other end of the scale" out and give them extra help. In making this argument, JYTTE implicitly draws on the understanding that the distribution of talent in society follows the mathematical principle of the Gaussian distribution; i.e. the bell curve (Porter 2018). She also refers to "talent teams" in sports to illustrate the concept of talent. This analogy may be an attempt to legitimize talent development as something harmless and uncontroversial in a school context.

JANNE is a teacher at a large school in a smaller town in the municipality. The school has many rural students and receives a large number of students from small rural schools without 8th–10th grade. Four students from this school attend the talent class, but they are not from the same class. JANNE teaches two of them, one from each of her 9th grades. She describes these students, and especially one of them, as "very hungry" to learn. About the talent class she says:

> *It adds to these children's self-esteem, being among others who want what they want and understand them … It is a great idea, and I think it is necessary to take it [the project] out of the public school and place it somewhere else. It could manifest itself in a negative way if it was placed here at the school; if you knew that all the talented students were in that class … I think it's curiosity rather than envy when it's placed somewhere else.* (JANNE)

JANNE's assessment includes the social aspect that being with likeminded in a talent class may increase children's self-esteem. She emphasizes repeatedly during the interview that the talent class is a good idea, but in the quote, she also says that gathering talented students in a class may have negative social effects at a school. She mentions that students who are not in the class may be envious, but she does not talk about potentially negative effects of being in a talent class.

TRINE is a teacher at a free school in town, and one of her students, Sille, is in the talent class. The free school emphasizes the social aspect and receives quite a few students with special school-related problems. Sille is in a class with only six students. According to Trine, only three of them function at a normal level, but they are not going to high school. She therefore thinks it has been good for Sille to get away and build up an appetite, be stimulated and get ahead in terms of high school. She says:

> *It is my impression that it is a really, really good idea, for I think that a link between public school and high school has been missing. I think we've been missing it for many years, because it's kind of been two worlds. Many students are shocked when they start in high school because it is a completely different culture … It's kind of like a stepping stone, I mean that's kind of what they want, right … attract more customers, right (laughs), and some more talented students who don't drop out …* (TRINE)

TRINE's enthusiasm with the talent class is based mainly on the idea that it accommodates some social needs in Sille, who is academically strong and is going on to high school. She sees the talent class primarily as a good transition to high school, which, due to its "completely different culture", may be difficult to handle for many students. When she says that many students experience a culture shock, she is probably referring to the relatively large share of the students the free school sends on to high school. The difference between the two school cultures is probably greater than between high school and public school, which are more alike in terms of class sizes and discipline-oriented academic standards. Her statement also indicates that she sees the high school's role in the talent project as an element in a recruitment strategy to capture good students.

The three teachers express their satisfaction with the talent project in each their way, based on their individual background, and list different benefits. JYTTE compares the project with special needs education and see it as a good thing that talented students are challenged in a way that she thinks the regular public school cannot. Her assessment is primarily based on the fact that the student she knows is very enthusiastic about the talent class. JANNE emphasizes the positive aspect in the fact that the talent class is placed at the high school and not at the students' own schools where it might expose them and make the other students envious. TRINE sees the talent class as a bridge between public school and high school – a bridge that might benefit the participating student as well as the high school, which can strengthen its ties to the potential target group.

Scepticism Towards Talent Development

At some schools, teachers' opposition to the project has been more prevalent. The teachers introduced below express more mixed attitudes and a certain scepticism towards talent development.

PER is vice-principal at a medium-sized school in a town with one other school. The school has one student, Benjamin, in the talent class, and Per is his math teacher. He describes Benjamin as "an incredibly clever mathematician" and thinks that he is perfectly capable of challenging him in his teaching. I asked him what he – and his colleagues – think about the talent project.

PER: *"Well, it's a little ambivalent. The first proposal was to take the students out one whole day, and that was a really poor model because it weakens the public school in order to strengthen something else. But I think the current model is perfect … as a spare time offer, as something extra, because these students are smart enough to grasp it."*

Interviewer: *"What do you think about it taking place at the high school and at one specific public school?"*

PER: *"Initially, the teachers and actually also the leadership at the other schools were against it. They thought it was a kind of odious project, and it was … But back then they implemented that model where we could see it in light of certain problems at the school …"*

Interviewer: *"How do the teachers at this school see it?"*

PER: *"It's the same thing; many of the teachers think it's odious and unnecessary."*

Some of the resistance to the talent project among the local teachers seems to be associated with the original model with one weekly day's teaching per week. Even though this model was discarded, PER sees widespread scepticism towards the project among his colleagues. When they see it as odious, it is probably because it goes against the dominant self-image and moral in the public school culture. A prominent element in this culture is that the public school system performs a social-educational role that tend to put community above individual (Hermann 2007, p. 174).

MORTEN is a teacher at the same school as JANNE. He is a class teacher and biology teacher of two talent class students. Occasionally, the talent class biology curriculum overlaps with his classes, which complicates his teaching. He would like some coordination so that he knows who does what. He says about his view of the talent class:

> *Well, it's somewhat dual. I can't deny that, and actually I've always been a fan of the comprehensive school and kind of still am. Of course, you can say that some students are very challenged academically and need support. But I think that support should be given in a class context, and those who are academically gifted should also be challenged in a class context instead of being split up. That can happen soon enough, but it is also clear to me that the two students I have, now have been challenged and have something to work with. The thing is, how good are we at differentiating? We have to admit that it's really hard …; I actually think that we as a school should challenge them academically in all directions. But I know that in class, the less gifted occupy the teachers' attention a lot of the time, so the gifted maybe don't get it, but …* (MORTEN)

MORTEN reflects on the need for differentiation of teaching, which he as a teacher struggles to meet. He acknowledges that it can be difficult to accommodate all students' needs for challenges in his teaching, but he does not think that picking out the talented students for further challenge is a good solution. He sees it as a step towards more ability-based teaching, which he opposes on principle.

BIRGIT is a teacher at a medium-sized school in a small town, which has two students in the talent class. She is math teacher for Magnus, one of the talent students, whom she describes as "a level above everyone else" in her class, where the level according to her is very varied. She says about the talent project:

> *I actually think it's OK, I mean it's fine. Obviously, I miss that … we could use some extra resources in the public schools for continued education. I mean so that we could do it there, you might say. I'm not crazy about the idea of removing something from the environment because I don't think it has the same effect. But if you could do something at the school, create some environments there, I think it would have a much better effect. Then I believe it would be "in" to go to school, to want to be good, which means that you could spread some rings in the water.* (BIRGIT)

BIRGIT outlines a dilemma between having special offers for gifted students and lacking resources to improve the environment for all students at the school.

Most teachers see advantages and disadvantages of the talent project in its current form. The two statements above represent the typical ambiguity when the teachers ask whether it is possible to implement sufficient teaching differentiation to accommodate both weak and gifted students. In the latter statement, the teacher argues for implementing talent development inside rather than outside the system.

The sceptical teachers especially emphasize that the talent project may make it even more difficult for teachers to differentiate their teaching, e.g.:

- *"… another thing that happens, for instance in biology, is that they are one month ahead of us, and then you have to feed them something new or something different. That was a dilemma for me. It would be easier if they went ahead with something else than the topics we were planning …"* (MORTEN)
- "It sometimes seems to me that he is bored because they've just done that up there and so on. And I know at least from his physics teacher that it can be a little hard for him because he is so far ahead of the others. So, it's more like an extra review of known material for him …" (BIRGIT)

The teachers may thus occasionally experience that the ability gap increases due to the talent classes. This raises the question which topics the talent classes should cover and how the teachers can give the students other challenges so that the teaching is not based on repetition of known material. This also raises the more basic question whether it is fair to offer some students more teaching than others:

> *I have also been an external examiner in physics for many years, and I may see one physics class at one school that has two lessons per week, and a physics class at another that has three. It is obvious at the exam that they have been through more stuff and are more confident, so … Somehow, I think that it's unfair that there are not equal conditions for everyone, because it means that the students who have three lessons get higher grades. That's the way it is, or at least it's a tendency …* (MORTEN)

The question of fairness may seem irrelevant based on the view that differentiation in teaching is required by law. This means adapting teaching to the individual child's needs and that some may need more time. However, it seems relevant to discuss whether it is fair to give the extra gifted more teaching time based on the view that it is an even more biased allocation of the already very limited resource, time.

The scepticism expressed by these informants can be summed up as offensiveness in relation to the dominant school culture's image of the community school, resistance to a reintroduction of the ability-based school and a waste of resources. As far as allocation of resources, the view is that they would be better used at the individual schools instead of being removed and let the development activity take place elsewhere. Not having sufficient resources to accommodate this special group of students is presented as a problem because the teacher's attention during class to a large extent is directed at "the weak" students. Therefore, prioritizing talent development also becomes a question of allocation of limited resources, and in that connection, it is questioned whether it is fair to spend more resources on accommodating resourceful students.

Attitudes Towards Resources and Frameworks for Talent-Differentiated Teaching

The talent report from the Ministry of Education (2011) claims that the population has a positive attitude towards talents. It refers to a survey (NIRAS 2010) that shows that 86% of the population agrees that it is acceptable to talk about other people as skilled and talented. It is much less acceptable to talk about oneself as skilled and talented. This is also true among talent class students, many of whom are hesitant to describe themselves as talented (see Chap. 5). However, the NIRAS survey also indicates that it is socially more acceptable to verbalize a talent the higher you advance in the educational system.

The talent report also indicates, again based on the NIRAS survey, that there are diverging attitudes to the allocation of resources between the academically weak and the academically gifted students in public school. In general, school actors believe to a higher extent than the population that specially gifted students can help raise the level in the entire class, and that the population to a lesser extent that school actors believe that the public school can strengthen talents. The survey leaves the overall impression that there is also room for the less gifted in the public school system. Both the population in general and public school teachers point to lack of resources as the most important barrier to talent development, and both groups also emphasize the public school's task to lift the masses (Ministry of Education 2011, p 23–24).

Lack of resources are not only seen as a barrier to talent development, but also to differentiated teaching (cf. EVA 2004, p. 71), maybe because "talent development" and differentiated teaching are seen as partially parallel phenomena, or because the former under the current conditions in the public school system is seen as conditioned by the latter.

According to Danish Psychological and Pedagogical Dictionary, differentiation in school can be understood in two ways: *student differentiation* and *teaching differentiation* (Hansen et al. 2005). Student differentiation represents an *external differentiation*, which organizational, structural. It implies a *segregated form of teaching* where the students are distributed in classes based on knowledge, skills and interests. Teaching differentiation represents *internal differentiation*, which is didactic, pedagogical. It implies an *integrated form of teaching* where students with different preconditions are gathered in classes, and the teaching (in terms of objectives, payoff, content, effort, methods, time, teacher support, material etc.) is adapted to the students' different preconditions in terms of knowledge, skills and interests.

Student differentiation in the public schools was legally abolished in 1993 and teaching differentiation was introduced as the fundamental principle (see Chap. 3). However, a legal implementation is not synonymous with a practical implementation, and much public school teaching still seems to follow traditional patterns with one teacher, one class and extensive blackboard teaching. In addition, the past decade's wave of legal requirements and initiatives, including the spread of an individualized evaluation culture that challenges the principle of differentiation, makes it difficult for teachers to experiment with new teaching methods and trials. Especially the introduction of binding teaching plans in the form of "Common Goals" and the national tests in effect force teachers to stick to traditional methods. The centrally decided teaching plans and national tests represent a rigid framework (Bernstein 2000) that in many ways work against increased student activity and inclusion. The more predefined learning objectives are dictated from above, the less room there is to accommodate special student needs.

The diversity in student preconditions in integrated teaching has been said to be overwhelming for teachers (Gross 2006). It contains a strong incentive to focus on the weakest or the "slowest" when teachers have to practice differentiation in teaching. By focusing on this group, the teacher can potentially not only improve this group's performance level but also limit the differences in skill level between the students in general and thereby make the teaching task easier. The opposite is true with regard to "gifted" students. By focusing on and letting this group advance further, the teacher increases the gap between them and other students and thus the gap between levels within the integrated classroom (Gross 2006, p. 124). From a teacher's point of view, it will become even more difficult to "include" the gifted within the scope of teaching plans that are designed for specific grades.

As another argument for selecting gifted students for special talent classes, Australian scholar Gross claims that gifted students prefer to learn and socialize with other children at their own intellectual and mental level. She therefore advocates that they are taught part time in special classes with "other gifted children" or children who a little older. If access to likeminded is limited, gifted students will supposedly either attempt to conceal their maturity and talent in order to be socially accepted by their classmates, or they will feel excluded and isolated and may prefer solitude rather than always having to integrate with classmates who are far less mature and have other interests (Gross 2006, p. 125).

However, special classes or teaching for gifted students do not eliminate the need for differentiated teaching. As LISE, a high school teacher in the talent class, points out, the students' preconditions are far less homogenous than she expected. Talents are divergent, as other talent studies conclude. It is possible to identify some common characteristics across talent domains, but talent development involves differentiation both in terms of abilities and in terms of which direction to develop them (Feldhusen 1998, p. 199).

Two Canadian scholars, Pyrut and Bosetti (2006), have argued that talented children's needs can just as well be accommodated within normal, integrated teaching. If the teacher lets the gifted students learn at a suitable speed, develop their critical and creative thinking, pursue their passions/interests, represent their knowledge in different ways and interact with likeminded, it should be possible to challenge them within the framework of regular teaching. The two scholars outline a model for talent-differentiated teaching, *Pyryt's P-model* (the name refers to its originator and its key components (*pace, process, passion, product* and *peers*)) (Pyrut and Bosetti 2006, p. 143). They maintain that this includes the significant preconditions for talent development within the framework of integrated teaching, and this to a large degree coincides with the qualities the students emphasize as talent-developing teaching (see Chap. 6).

The pace component implies that the specially gifted advance faster through the curriculum than other students. *The process component* points towards the problem-oriented teaching approach, which in a Danish context is also known as problem-oriented project work or pedagogy (however, there is a risk of confusion of concepts as the English literature in this context uses expressions like curriculum enrichment – p. 144). *The passion component* implies that the students are offered involvement and co-determination in the teaching, which can also be effectuated in relation to project pedagogy. *The product component* refers to the students' presentation of their project products or other learning, which in other words implies that they present their acquired knowledge to the other students in class. *The peer component* means giving the specially gifted a chance to interact with likeminded, and if there are no likeminded in the class, interacting with likeminded across classes and grades during school hours.

Pyrut and Bosetti see the teachers' inability to effectively differentiate their teaching as the biggest obstacle to integration and challenges to gifted students (2006, p. 150). Based on multiple studies, they claim that teachers who possess specialized, learning plan-related knowledge are better equipped to differentiate and be aware of gifted students' emotional needs.

As another barrier to giving gifted students with special needs suitable challenges within regular teaching, they mention the focus on measuring throughout the educational area. The accountability movement that has influenced practice throughout the system obstructs possibilities for talent-developing measures as the ones mentioned above. Teachers in a learning plan or curriculum-focused test culture are primarily focused on matching their teaching to the demands the students have to fulfil in the national tests and exams. Such conditions mean hard times for student- and problem-oriented projects because the teachers above all are focused on improving student performance within the same areas instead of differentiating their learning outcome based on abilities.

Teachers' Competences and the Dual Function

Over the past few decades, a widespread mistrust in the Danish public school system has manifested itself in the media and among politicians. It is nourished via frequent references to international studies where Danish students show mediocre results. The legislation and the teachers have taken the blame for students not learning enough. Among the political responses to this criticism was a new school legislation in 2006 towards a more ability-focused school and the introduction of a new teacher education in 2007, which would equip the teachers "to provide the students with knowledge and skills". However, this latter aspect of the new objective for the school combined with the considerable external steering implied by the introduction of pedagogic "innovations" like tests and student plans, does not appeal to the teachers' professionalism in the form of authority and judgment, but rather to a "bureaucratization of the teacher in a service relation" (Hermann 2010).

The teachers in the talent class project studied here encounter recognition of their professional and pedagogic competences in one or more ways: They have been selected and asked to participate in the talent project, and their students characterize them as good teachers. But what characterizes these teachers and their teaching in relation to talent development?

The prospect of experiencing the students' reciprocal and voluntary interest in their subject is among the main justifications for participating in talent development (see Chap. 4). Especially public school teachers link this with the opportunity to develop their own professional competence, which is thus linked with some degree of reciprocity or teaching students who are almost at one's (the teacher's) own level. The simultaneous emphasis of this aspect and the opportunity to develop own professional competences indicates that the teachers condition their own professional challenge on reciprocity and interest among the students. In other words, they want to be challenged in their professional knowledge, i.e. the knowledge that relates to school subjects and is sometimes called subject specific knowledge. Several of the teachers also emphasize a social dimension, but not HOLGER (9th grade talent class science teacher), who, as mentioned in Chap. 4, considers talent class teaching "an external task", i.e., a primarily technical service in the form of knowledge dissemination.

It is important to keep in mind that public school teachers have a special, dual function. The school is not only tasked with communicating knowledge, but also with shaping human beings who are capable of functioning and contributing to social progress now and in the future. In addition to developing the students' academic skills, the school is also responsible for education and formation of personality, just as it has to create the foundation for a societal community (Carlgren and Marton 2002, p. 82). This is also known as the dilemma between formation and education. Even though the new objects clause and legislative wording has toned down the school's formative task, it remains an important element in the school's practical function, even though "general education" now to a larger extent resembles competition and logic of accommodation (Weber 2010).

Many of the teachers mention that they carry out and appreciate this dual function in the school. HANS (9th grade talent class science teacher), for example, wants *the students to experience a correlation between the subjects* and finds it important to participate in the social life of the class and cooperate with its other teachers. He thus moves beyond the purely subject-specific mindset and emphasizes that it is part of his role to contribute to a holistic approach and a positive fellowship among the students.

GITTE (8th grade talent class English teacher) is ambivalent about the fact that teaching a talent class may be perceived as cultivating the elite. She thinks that public school teachers in general are against this idea, which may indirectly express an implicit understanding that the school is also responsible for furthering community. However, the ambivalence between the subject-specific task and the formative task is also embedded in the school's practice via the selective function it exercises via its system of tests and exams. This duality is conceptualized as the school's *hidden curriculum* (Broady 1987) and implies an ambiguity or discrepancy between the school's official curriculum and its actual practice.

The hidden curriculum describes the situation that on the one hand, the school's objectives, which are "officially" described in the School Act, guide teachers in the teaching process. On the other hand, there are external frameworks without an "official" foundation that may not be written down or statutory, namely the demands the school situation places on students. These external frameworks and demands are defined outside the teaching process itself and are beyond the individual teacher's and student's control. They are the values, attitudes and norms that are implicitly passed on to the students and assumed to discipline them into accepting the authority structure of school and society.

The school-leaving exams are one example of an external authority structure as they in practical terms have proven to have a highly disciplining effect on both students' and teachers' behavior in the teaching process since they represent the last chance for students to pull themselves together before the final verdict (Rasmussen and Friche 2011). This disciplining is indirectly expressed in a statement by a talent class teacher who observes, with some surprise, that the students show up for talent class even though there is no final exam.

This leads to the question of what the most important role is for the school beyond communicating knowledge; to educate the students by teaching them community or to increase competition among them in order to select the most gifted? As mentioned earlier in this chapter, separating students based on ability can, according to the teacher MORTEN, "happen soon enough". This statement shows that this function is already contained in the school's sorting processes. The question is how early it should be effectuated.

Talent development, which involves selection based, first, on identification of talents, gives the teacher a powerful tool in relation to the individual student. This is true whether such a practice is based on tests, on personal assessment or on a combination of methods and types of IQ tests. IQ testing is a very powerful tool, and the IQ score often becomes very significant for the test subject, despite the ambiguity and uncertainties associated with the concept of intelligence (Bendixen 2009). The

powerful aspect applies to the intended objectivity in all tests, which despite statisticians' efforts will be biased in terms of culture and subject (Bendixen 2006, p. 33), and to the more personal assessment, which is based on how well the teacher knows the students and the chemistry between the teacher and the individual students. Both elements are thus ingrained in and interact with other sociocultural factors.

A qualitative study described by two British scholars, Ron Casey and Valsa Koshy, illustrates the dilemmas a teacher may face in terms of identifying talent. In the study, a teacher voices his reluctance to list talented students because such a list may easily become decisive and definitive and affect children's self-image and entire future whether they are on the list or not. Selecting a share of 5–10% as gifted, which the British system encourages, makes it even more difficult. As a student in the study pointed out to the teacher, he had been in the "talent group" at his former school, and he wanted to know why he wasn't now and whether it was possible, over time, to "lose one's intelligence" (Casey and Koshy 2006, p. 92). This shows that the student sees the designation as talent as something permanent, which once it has been achieved cannot be lost, but creates a certain amount of pressure. This is true for the nominee, who has to live up to the talent, and it is true for the student's teachers and surroundings, who may face expectations that talent is something special therefore requires special treatment.

Competing Discourses on the Identification of Talent

In the talent classes, the students had signed up for participation; some with guidance from parents or teachers. This was the point of departure the first and the second year, but the first year did include entrance exams. The actors' own understanding of talent was thus decisive for the construction of talent in this context.

The students define their own "talents" in different ways. As the different talent type constructions in Chap. 5 show, the understanding of talent depends on the background of the "talent". Whether talent come easy or is it something one has to fight and work hard for depends, to a very large extent, on one's cultural capital in the form of educational resources and sociocultural environment. The outstanding and multiple talents have plenty of cultural capital and are comfortable with their talent, which they tend to describe as something inherent – "it has just always been like that".

In comparison, the quiet and industrious talents are more alien to talent and do not take it for granted like the two other talent types. They tend to describe their own talent as "a special interest" in subjects, which means that they do well in school. They feel and are therefore aware that it is not automatic but depends on a special personal effort and on a good learning environment that includes someone they can identify with. This is especially important for someone like Ida ("quiet talent"), who is interested in something that is not typical for her gender, or for someone like Khaled ("industrious talent"), who seeks social status and recognition, which he experiences as very difficult to achieve with his ethnic minority background.

The students clearly have reservations about widespread stereotypical perceptions of talent as especially clever children, nerds or someone who feels better than everyone else. Being associated with such versions of talent may result in dissociation from youth fellowships in and around their normal school and they do not want that. Some of the talent students have therefore developed special strategies to avoid the talent concept when they communicate with other youths about their participation in the talent class (see Chap. 5).

So, what did the students want with the talent class? Many of the students who wrote in their applications for the first year that they wanted bigger challenges. Perhaps because that is what you write in an application, and the expression reflects the formulation in the selection criteria. However, they also offer more strategic reasons concerning the possible advantages of participating in the talent class in terms of future studies. This demonstrates that the students are very aware of the importance and value of education. Even though both parents and the school in several instances have influenced the students to apply, most students emphasize that the decision was their own. This also demonstrates the level of self-determination and – management, which is emphasized as very valuable in educational contexts (Moos 2007).

Like the students, the talent class teachers have different understandings of talent and of whether the students have talent. The public school teachers emphasize talent as a special potential or special abilities that only a minority possesses. Some of the teachers see these abilities as congenital, others see them as acquired. However, there is widespread agreement that exercising them requires effort and will. Moreover, many of the teachers claim that they emphasize commitment, interest and motivation in addition to special academic skills.

The teachers' descriptions of the students in the talent class reflect two of the above-mentioned properties: special abilities within a specific field of knowledge or skill plus interest and motivation; i.e., a distinction between already acquired knowledge and an ambition about further knowledge, which is verbalized in descriptions of the students as quick to understand and apply knowledge and as eager to learn. The high school teachers are more moderate in their descriptions of the students in the talent classes. Their assessment is, to a larger extent, based on high school-level academic competences within the subject areas that are taught in the talent classes rather than the broader, general terms of the public school teachers. They saw the students in the talent class as interested students and "a few as bright and inquisitive", but "not as talents as such".

These different teacher perceptions and talent distinctions are related to the question of whether and how to identify talent. If talent is understood as an academic performance at a given point in time, it may make sense to use tests and measure the students' performance. If it is understood as a potential that has yet to be developed, then the question is how to identify it. This question is prominent in psychology-based talent research, which points out that standardized psychological and academic tests alone do not constitute a sufficient basis (Bendixen 2009; Casey and Koshy 2006; Feldhusen 1998). The fact that tests only measure a part of a child's potential in one specific context emphasizes the necessity of qualitative data and

information. Despite broad scepticism towards intelligence tests as the only identification factor, American schools predominantly use such tests to identify talent (Callahan and Hiatt 1998; Feldhusen 1998). One reason may be that using standardized tests appears less resource-demanding than other, more qualitative methods.

Another question is who performs the identification. The need for qualitative data and information gathered via pedagogic observation points to it being primarily a task for teachers. Some teachers find it challenging to have to pick out 5–10% of a cohort of students and saw many students as having potential talent that had not been expressed in their test performances. In addition, these teachers had to base their selection on own "impressions" and observations of students in class (Casey and Koshy 2006). Other British experiences show that identification of talent is the most problematic aspect of the talent development policy (Eyre and McClure 2012).

The understanding of talent as a potential is, in addition to the problem of identification, associated with another issue. Designating some children as talents creates a dichotomy in relation to the children who do not achieve that designation. If the objective is to designate some limited percentage of the students as talents, the large majority will indirectly be designated as "non-talents". This raises questions about the expectations and motivations such a talent development practice will give rise to among the nominated and the non-nominated talents.

When you communicate to a group of students that they are intelligent, it implies a risk that they see their own abilities as a given whole rather than a potential that requires an effort to be developed. Moreover, it may trigger negative reactions from contemporaries when students are designated as intelligent or talented. Even though this is often described as a special Danish "who-do-you-think-you-are" mentality, such tendencies have also been shown in American studies (Feldhusen 1998). Likewise, it has been suggested that it may seem pedagogically incorrect to indirectly tell the large majority of students that they are not intelligent and *do not* have talent. Then again, it can be said that schools have already practiced this for many years (Feldhusen 1998, p. 195).

The distinction between the talented few and the large majority is thus to a large extent related to the issue of differentiation and the question of what the most important role for teachers and schools is and should be. It is thus fair to ask whether it is the teacher's task, within the framework of the public school, to nominate students as talents and start a selection process. As far as differentiated teaching, the question is whether the school is required to guarantee suitable challenges for all students inside or outside the framework of the class fellowship. The Folkeskole Act formulates the section on differentiation in teaching as follows:

> *The organisation of the teaching, including the choice of teaching and working methods, teaching materials and the selection of subject-matter, shall in each subject live up to the aims of the Folkeskole and shall be varied so that it corresponds to the needs and prerequisites of the individual pupil.*
>
> *It shall be up to the headmaster to ensure that the class teacher and the other teachers of the class plan and organise the teaching in such a way that it offers challenges to all pupils.*

The act is in principle open to interpretation in both an individualistic and a more community-oriented direction, even though its wording unambiguously emphasizes the individual focus.

The legislation as well as school practice reflect a culture-political battle between two philosophies over the school's role in society (Nielsen 2006b). One emphasizes community, solidary and "soft values" like working together on common causes, democratic education, interdisciplinarity and undivided classes in the comprehensive school. The other emphasizes efficiency, economic growth, competition and individual ambition, expressed in an education policy that prioritizes subject-specific competences, tests, external evaluation and competition among students and among schools.

Concluding Discussion: The Talent Agenda and the Social Condition

Many recent initiatives have reinforced the individuality trend, and especially the talent development initiative. The two overall philosophies for school and society – community versus individual competition – are also expressed by the external teachers in diverging attitudes towards talent development. Support for talent classes typically focuses on the individual student's outcome, and the scepticism focuses on the class fellowship. It is supposedly through this fellowship that education for the societal community should take place. The teachers still see the school's and their task as dual: They have to communicate subject-specific competences and they have to educate the students to participate in a societal community. The word "still" indicates that the individual aspect of the task is gaining ground these years, for example via initiatives for new methods or new ideas about separating the students, which to a higher extent encourages student differentiation than teaching differentiation.

The question about which form of differentiation is central in relation to the legal requirement that the schools provide all students with adequate challenges. The integrated classroom, which has room for highly diverging student competences, constitutes a large challenge in terms of teaching. An obvious logic for the teacher would be to seek to reduce this diversity by focusing on boosting the weakest students. Based on this logic, the teacher will increase the ability gap by focusing on the most gifted and thus make the teaching task for difficult (Gross 2006). However, there is no empirical evidence that this type of logic is guiding practice. Moreover, streaming based on skills would not eliminate the need for differentiated teaching. Even in a talent class, the diversity in skill levels may surprise the teacher.

Experiences from talent class teaching show that students prefer teaching based on student inclusion and co-determination. When some of the students state that they lack challenges in school, it may actually be this form of teaching that they lack. According to their public school teachers, the talented students also function well in regular class teaching; they do not see it as particularly difficult to include them.

The question about a selective versus a comprehensive school has not been considered relevant for the ordinary public school teacher. Even though teachers see the comprehensive school as incontestable, the 2011 Talent Report from the Ministry of Education recommends that public school students choose a track in 7th grade. The question about the selective school and student-differentiated teaching thus reappears on the political agenda.

Some teachers point out that talented students need offers like the talent classes that allow them to be around likeminded peers. However, they also mention that it may create problems if this takes place within the framework of the students' own school where it may cause envy among contemporaries. Identifying talent among students may have a two-way exclusionary effect, since children who are *selected* may risk social exclusion in relation to their class mates. Whether ability-based selection is voluntary or based on tests, our analyses indicate that talent identification implies a social selection. It is thus primarily students with cultural capital who enter talent classes.

Identifying talent is not unproblematic, rather the opposite. Such identification processes will, whether they are based on teachers' assessments or on "objective" tests, be subjectively influenced by culture and subject understandings. The teacher may become a crucial power factor in the selection of children with or without talent, which has been shown to be problematic in British and American studies (Callahan and Hiatt 1998; Casey and Koshy 2006; Feldhusen 1998). Identifying talent is somewhat unpleasant, both for teachers and students. For the teachers, it actualizes dilemmas in their role as communicators of formation and education, between talent as potential or performance, and the question of keeping the students motivated to take an education. If talent is seen as a potential, how is it possible to make an unambiguous identification? Who does not possess this potential? In terms of pedagogy, it may be problematic to identify talents because the nominated (and the non-nominated) may perceive it as something very definitive. Finally, there may be a cultural flipside in the sense that being identified and not being identified as a talent may have a two-way exclusionary effect.

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Chapter 8
Excellence, Talent and Education in a Global Perspective

Introduction

This chapter explores excellence in general and talent in particular as a globalized phenomenon in education. Education today takes place in a global setting, which makes it meaningful to analytically talk about a global education space. The notion of a 'global education space' lends attention to national education systems being permeated by many similar components, such as marketisation, testing, accountability and rankings (Kelly 2018; Plum 2014; Smith 2016). Although education systems deliver different responses as a result of contextual conditions, a core trait of global education today is that education policies generally are introduced in reference to international developments, standards, and priorities (Lindblad et al. 2015; Rizvi and Lingard 2010) and that there is a strong tendency to depoliticize education policy solutions (Gunter 2018).

In this light, the analyses of the preceding chapters may be viewed as historical and Danish sociological-empirical perspectives on the build-up and manifestations of important parts of the contemporary global education space revolving around excellence and the concept of talent in education. It is the purpose of this chapter to connect the findings of the preceding chapters with core features of the global education space in order to uncover new perspectives and establish the range and scope of the analyses presented here.

Connecting historical and case study findings with contemporary research on global education requires a theoretical lens able to cultivate and create connectivity between historical, sociological, national and global phenomena of the global education space. While such an endeavour has found multiple methodological responses in contemporary research – and to some extent has been an area of contestation – we find the analytical concept of 'policyscapes', put forth by Stephen Carney (2009), useful in this respect (see Chap. 1).[1]

[1] For presentations and discussions of the different schools, concepts and approaches currently being used in education policy studies, see Mundy et al. (2016) and Verger et al. (2018).

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Policyscapes is a tool with which to creatively explore the spread of policy ideas and pedagogical practices across different national school systems (Carney 2009, p. 68). In other words, policyscapes is an analytical concept that investigates the very production of globalization and enables a focus on "(…) meta-discourses that shape what can be thought" (Mundy et al. 2016, p. 8). Carney points out that policyscapes "(…) are transnational in character and have at their core a particular constellation of visions, values, and ideology" (Carney 2009, p. 79). The strength of the concept is its ability to frame parallel – and at times contradictory – developments of homogenization and heterogenization across global, national and local contexts. Inspired by the work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2006/1996) – and his idea about five different forms of '-scapes' characterizing globalization: ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes – the analytical concept of policyscapes creates awareness about how social scenes are formatted like vertical and horizontal landscapes. In that sense, the concept includes a critique of theoretical positions that tend to frame analyses too sharply according to a traditional world of national borders (i.e. methodological nationalism).

However, a critical reflection on policyscapes has been put forth by Susan Robertson (2018, p. 45) who has criticized the concept of 'policyscapes' for an amorphous understanding of power, obscuring history, containing an underdeveloped conception of the present, and for lacking boundaries that order difference. While these critiques find their relevance on a theoretical level, the historical and sociological empirical components of this book allow us to counter this critique of 'policyscapes' when combining the concept with our analyses in the preceding chapters. First, power has been treated through the lens of capital as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu. Second, the book has made extensive use of historical analysis which creates knowledge about trajectories, developments, and the conditions of contemporary policies, i.e. contextual knowledge about the present. And third, the starting point in a distinctly organizational (the OECD) and a national context (Denmark) establishes critical awareness of the boundaries that order difference. Informed by this criticism, using the concept of policyscapes in our context amounts to investigating the transnational policyscape created around notions of excellence and talent in education from our distinct starting points.

Translated into a research question, we ask how the need for cultivating excellence in education has been framed and justified in a landscape cutting across local context and the global education space.

As we shall see, such a question allows us to identify three central interconnected frames of the transnational policyscape revolving around – but not limited to – notions about talent in education: (1) the framing of useful research, (2) the economic, human capital framing of education, and (3) the framing of gifted and talented as special needs. The chapter will be structured accordingly.

The Framing of Useful Research – Evidence-Based Research and Neoliberal Reform

A condition for understanding the policyscape revolving around talent in the global education space is the field of education research which shapes the way practitioners and decision-makers think about excellence and talent. In the same way, research methodology, research priorities, and research purposes play an important role. Education research is, however, a contested field with many different interests, stakeholders, and agents. As Walter W. Heller, chair of the Council of Economic Advisers – a key speaker at the first OECD conference on education in 1961 – noted, "May I say that, in this context, the fight for education is too important to be left solely to the educators" (OECD 1961, p. 35). If anything, the quotation signals that considerations other than the formation of citizenry, pedagogy and didactics had found their way into education (Ydesen and Grek 2019).

In this light it comes as no surprise that the global field of educational research often finds itself in an acrimonious environment with significant antagonism between at least two main clusters; one being the evidence-based what-works type of research – often oriented towards quantitative methods and randomized control trials – and the other being critical research adhering to pedagogical ideals about *Bildung* and emancipation as well as a notion of pedagogy/education being a unique field of its own with its own values and contributions (Kvernbekk 2011; Ottesen et al. 2013; Rømer 2017). Apart from methodological disagreements and disagreements over the very role of research, a core element of contestation is which kind of research is useful and productive to society. In this parameter, the evidence-based what-works type of research often holds the edge. As such, it is often researchers practicing this kind of research who are invited into government expert groups and committees, who enter into consortia with private consultancy firms, and collaborate with the edu-businesses developing their technologies and business models (Cowen 2018; Gunter and Mills 2017; Hogan et al. 2015).

To a large extent, the backdrop of this somewhat polarized educational research landscape is the ubiquitous presence of neoliberal reform which has shifted education at all levels in a distinctly economic direction (Connell 2013). The same holds true of educational research where researchers are required to compete for funding in order to secure advancement or even secure their employment (Cowen 2018). Besides academic standards, the criteria of success are impact and usefulness in terms of policy development and the development of practices. This is a distinct move away from former Humboldtian university ideals emphasizing autonomy and academic freedom (Rhoads 2018). As pointed out by Brown and Tannock (2009), one of the backdrops is what they term 'the global war for talent' in higher education which spurs "(…) European universities to bring in more 'US-like changes', including private industry/public university partnerships, university patenting rights, an emphasis on fostering entrepreneurship and competitiveness, and a more highly stratified 'all-star' salary and funding structure." (p. 383). These changes all fall under the umbrella of neoliberal reform; i.e. the marketization of education.

But in order to understand the connections between neoliberal reform and evidence-based research one has to understand the self-image of much evidence-based research as being a depoliticized, fact-presenting endeavour able to inform both policy and practice (Elliot 2001). But perhaps more importantly, it is necessary to delve deeper into the educational ideas and policies promoted in the Anglo-Saxon world because it constitutes a powerful source of inspiration in the shaping of the global education space. The national educational research discourse in Anglo-Saxon countries shows a long tradition of evidence-based approaches and discussions. As argued by Lawn and Furlong (2010) – drawing on Bridges (2006) – the consequence has been that the contribution of the 'foundation disciplines' of sociology, psychology, philosophy, history and economics to the study of education has been contested in much of the English-speaking world from at least the 1980s (p. 1–2).

On the same note, Gert Biesta (2007) argues that educational research and practice has been transformed along the lines of a range of initiatives aimed at narrowing the gap between research, policy, and practice in Britain, "(…) among these are attempts to synthesize the findings of educational research through the conduct of systematic research reviews (…), and attempts to make the outcomes of research more readily available to different educational constituencies (…)."

In Denmark, we have witnessed a significant Anglo-Saxon inspiration in education policy development. In 2004, the OECD made a distinct recommendation for the establishment of a Clearinghouse for Educational Research in Denmark. As pointed out by John Krejsler (2017), the new clearinghouse was to draw on the works of the British Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-Ordinating Centre (EPPI) as well as the American What Works Clearinghouse (WWC).

Looking specifically at talent in education, it is clear that research concerned with testing, categorizations and measurement stand central. For instance, Stephen Ball, in his analysis of the English education system, writes about the "waste of talent" discourse standing in opposition to eugenicist discourse (Ball 2013). The common denominator, however, was that the population was a resource to be managed and education took centre stage in this process. The talented were to be identified using tests and other evidence-based mechanisms to make sure that it either became clear who was fit and who was not fit (eugenics) or who had unexploited or promising talent that would benefit society (waste of talent discourse; as we have also seen in Chap. 2). With the 1944 education act, psychometric measurement of intelligence quotients (IQs) remained a widespread practice in the United Kingdom (Ørskov and Ydesen 2018). Testing was used diagnostically in schools as an apparently scientific way of objectively assessing the intellectual ability of both individuals and groups (Simon 1953; Thom 2004). The context of this practice was the introduction of a system of three educational tracks; namely the grammar, secondary modern, and technical schools. The main selection tool in this streaming system was the 11-Plus examination, which was effectively a form of intelligence test. As argued by Ydesen and Myers (2016, 462), "Intelligence carried with it the scientific aura that allowed professionals to make seemingly neutral judgements regarding individuals or population groups."

The 11-plus test remains active in some counties in England and Northern Ireland even today. And in a broader picture various types of ability testing remains widespread across the world. While these types of tests are not IQ-tests per se, Gillborn and Youdell (2001), in their seminal study, have argued that

> *(…) 'ability' has come to be understood (by policymakers and practitioners alike) as a proxy for common sense notions of 'intelligence' and that ability testing "(…) offer an apparently fair and just means for the rationing of education. In fact, 'ability' is constituted in ways that provide for the systematic disadvantaging of particular socially defined groups, especially children of working-class and Black/African-Caribbean heritage.* (p. 65)

If anything, testing practices – while intimately connected with notions of excellence and talent – seem to be associated with severe biases in terms of gender, race, and social class (Stobart 2008). As pointed out by the Israeli professor of language education, Elana Shohamy (2004):

> *The social and educational consequences of […] powerful uses [of tests] are of special significance in multicultural societies as tests are often used to force different groups to accept the knowledge of the dominant group and to serve as gatekeepers for groups such as immigrants and indigenous groups.* (p. 74)

The picture emerging from these studies testifies to the inherent problem of fairly and justly identifying talent. It seems like the old eugenicist discourse still – even if more subtly – has the upper hand over the "waste of talent" discourse.

Looking into the history of education research, American influence took centre stage when the Organisation of European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) – the predecessor of the OECD – established 'forms of goal-oriented educational governance' that derived from the US war department during World War II (Bürgi 2016, p. 410). The method was called 'systems analysis' and the idea was to view education systems as vehicles for the optimization of processes between input and output. In the late 1950s, the Ford Foundation funded a large-scale quantitative systems analysis study conducted by the Research and Development (RAND) think tank to 'determine relationships between school characteristics and educational output' (Kershaw and Roland 1959). In a historical perspective, this kind of research fed into the development of education indicators and culminated with the launch of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000 (Grek and Ydesen 2021).

Another example is the clearinghouse activities in the United States in 1953 surveying existing school programmes and teaching practices with a particular view on the nation's needs and resources of specialized talents. In this process, the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, an integral part of Teachers College Colombia, initiated the Talented Youth Project. The development of this project was guided by two basic assumptions. First, accepting the public school's commitment to provide appropriate educational experiences for all children and youth according to the full measure of their individual differences, the staff was to approach the education of the talented as an integral part of total curriculum planning. Second, recognizing research as a basis for improving school practice, the staff was to focus its efforts on initiating experiments in cooperating field laboratories and stimulating studies in other interested school systems (Passow 1957).

Thus, we see the contours of a rather distinct component of the policyscape revolving around the excellence and the concept of talent in education; namely evidence-based type of research employing the tools of testing, categorizations and measurement, and aimed at the development and improvement of policies and practices in general and talent in education in particular. However, the 'what-works' and 'best-practice' approach is, a recurring object of problematization in education research; not least because of its universalist conclusions. As pointed out by Gita Steiner-Khamsi "The false claim of universality is epitomized by the what-went-right approach" (Steiner-Khamsi 2013, p. 22). Steiner-Khamsi argues that "(…) similarity of systems must be assumed for policy learning to take place. However, the pressure on policy makers to adopt 'best practices' is sometimes so great that they resort to hiring researchers who help construct 'similarities', that may exist only on paper." (Ibid. p. 27). It is a potential problem because these positivist searches for universal "laws" in education have a hard time taking local cultural and historical conditions into account (Radtke 2009).

In the following two sections we shall explore two interconnected frames of the talent policyscape often underpinned by the education research component described above.

The Economic, Human Capital Framing of Education

In education policies aimed at the promotion of excellence and the identification and cultivation of talents, the economy appears to constitute a main driver. Outlining the conceptual history in Chap. 2, we found that OECD have contributed enormously to framing educational talent as a necessary condition for economic development. And as we have seen in Chaps. 3 and 7, the talent programs in Denmark refer to Denmark's competitive position in the world economy and to education playing an important part in assuring the competitive advantage of the nation.

In the global education space, a number of uneven developments conflate into a policy(edu)scape revolving around talent in education. Some of the overall elements are the rise of international organisations such as UNESCO, the IEA, and the OECD after World War II as well as the comparative turn in global education policy, which according to Martens (2007) must be understood in light of cross-national comparison being considered the best engine to promote educational quality (Waldow and Steiner-Khamsi 2019; Ydesen and Andreasen 2020). These elements are epitomized in the recent product development of PISA into PISA for development, PISA for schools, PISA4U, and PISA for 5-year-olds (Addey et al. 2017; Lewis 2017, 2020).

It is the purpose of this section to delve into the economic, human capital framing of education as a central component of the policyscape revolving around the concept of talent in education.

An important point of orientation is the link between education and social advancement. As pointed out by leading British sociologists, middle classes around the world are increasingly strategic to assure that their children have access to educa-

tional programmes that can confer them an educational advantage (Ball 2003). From a critical perspective, Tomlinson (2008) argues that the 'progress' is based on a one-dimensional understanding that a more comfortable life via enhanced consumption of material goods, is the only rational view of life. In this sense, the cultivation of talent in educational is nourished by a bottom-up social struggle dynamic. The other side of the coin is the top-down national economic growth kind of argument where talent is perceived as a resource to be exploited for the greater good of the nation.

In England, a model of gifted and talented education appeared in 1999 and implementation began in 2002 with the establishment of a state-funded National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY). The model was characterized by an ambition to incorporate talent development as an integrated part of the general school system and thereby make it accessible to all talented youths, not only those from a wealthy family background. While this model includes an equity argument, the English model on gifted and talented education contain mainly an economic rationale of promoting competitive advantages of individual students, which was then supposed to contribute to driving up performance in the knowledge economy (Rasmussen and Lingard 2018). In this sense, the model connects with the perception of talent as a national pool of intellectual potential, as we have identified in Chap. 2.

But economic rationales behind programs for so-called gifted and talented students can be located much earlier in other parts of the Anglo-Saxon world. In fact, the United States in many ways stand out as a pioneer in education for the gifted and talented framed by an economic agenda. Already from the late 1800s, gifted education took place as 'special education for high ability students' in individual schools. The need to provide education for the gifted and talented was considered important to develop the young American nation, and for identifying talent, testing was an important tool (Reese 2013). Widespread use of IQ tests and special arrangements for the highest scoring students characterized the American educational system from its early days, where tests were conducted at all levels to identify specially gifted students (Kaufman and Sternberg 2007). American bureaucrats and businessmen facing a rapidly growing and heterogeneous population, saw IQ-testing as a useful means to develop society and create economic wealth.

In 1957, the launch of the Soviet Sputnik satellite triggered a flood of criticism of the American educational system. A high-ranking admiral in the United States Navy warned that if the US wanted to compete on equal terms with other countries, it had to focus more on selecting and offering the gifted special opportunities in school; it became a common assumption in the early years of the Cold War that the talent mass in science could guarantee national security. With the National Defence Education Act of 1958, the United States gained its historical pre-eminence in setting up provisions for the gifted and talented (Ornstein 2015).

But the identification of target groups for special educational provisions – in the United States and elsewhere – was accompanied by much psychological debate and research concerning relevant testing measures and conceptions of giftedness (Robinson and Clinkenbeard 2008). Qualities and distinctions vary across cultures and socio-economic contexts as do criteria for excellence (Philipson and McCann 2007). Most psychometricians championed the objective, scientific nature of IQ

testing thus arguing the irrelevance of culture and socio-economic context (e.g. Phelps 2009). For instance, the selection of talented children in Greenland in the late 1960s saw the introduction of the so-called Greenlandic Non-Verbal Test Battery. This special Greenlandic version of the test battery was standardised on Greenlandic pupils and was based on a test developed by Professor Kaj Spelling (1915–1994) during his time as a UNESCO educational advisor in Malaysia (Spelling 1963). Spelling's GNVTB-test provides a good example of the use of an intelligence test as a technology able to counteract the problems of context. The discourse surrounding the use of the test was lodged in meritocratic ideals aimed at spotting talent effectively and adequately (Ydesen 2011).[2]

In a broader perspective, such meritocratic ideals played into the neoliberal reforms sweeping across education in the Anglo-Saxon world from the 1980s onwards. According to Jo Littler (2018), the neoliberal version of meritocracy can be understood as an extension of "(…) the idea of competitive individualism into the nooks and crannies of everyday life, through for example, personal branding and the extension of entrepreneurial activity to the everyday." (p. 4–5). The links with economics and economic concerns are unmistakable.

The economic, human capital framing of education is also very clear in the early work of the OECD in education. In the early 1960s, the Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel launched a programme of 'economic growth and investment in education' (Bürgi 2016; Ydesen and Grek 2019) and, with support from the Ford Foundation, established a 'Study Group on the Economics of Education'. A twin programme from the same period was the Mediterranean Regional Project (MRP) launched by the OEEC governing committee in 1960 and further pursued by the OECD (OEEC 1960). Following a labour-force planning approach, this project 'aimed at the drawing up of a planning framework for the allocation of resources to education in Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and Yugoslavia in relation to the requirements arising out of economic, demographic, and social development up to 1975' (Lyons 1964, p. 12).

Even today, the link between talent, economic prosperity, meritocracy and education – a core element of human capital theory – is a widely held truth and a central component of the policyscape revolving around the concept of talent in education. In 2013, the World Economic Forum published its Human Capital report emphasizing precisely this link:

> The key for the future of any country and any institution lies in the talent, skills and capabilities of its people. With talent shortages projected to become more severe in much of the developed and developing world, it will be imperative to turn our attention to how these shortages can be met in the short term and prevented in the long term (World Economic Forum 2013).

[2] It is thought-provoking that Spelling, who was a former educational psychologist and professor at the Royal Danish School of Education, looking back at his many years of work, wrote in 1992: "The worst aberration of the intelligence research and theories was the IQ. I admit that I have calculated thousands of IQs in the past, but today I regret every single one of them, if they were used for the evaluation of a child. (…) The IQ was a dangerous weed in the garden of pedagogical psychology." (Spelling 1992, p. 267).

Following these observations, it is justifiable to describe the economic, human capital framing of education as a central part of the contemporary global education space revolving around the concept of talent in education. But at the same time, it is also clear that such a framing in the policyscape induces severe limitations to our understanding of talent in education because of its disregard for context, power structures, and its validation of economic concerns and unilinear ideas about measurements (Brown and Tannock 2009).

Inclusive Framing – Gifted and Talented as Special Needs

The last framing of the policyscape created around notions of talent in education to be addressed in this chapter is the inclusive framing. As we have seen in Chaps. 2 and 3, talented students are often viewed as being subject to inclusive education measures because they constitute a special group of children that the school has to accommodate.

In Australia, attending the needs of gifted and talented are framed within the category of special needs education. Thus, when the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented in 2001 released an enquiry under the title of The Education of Gifted Children, the subsequent policy recommendations included giftedness under the category of 'special needs' (McCann 2007, p. 426). The placing of gifted education in Australian federal policy within this category and recognising these needs (McCann 2007) was considered pivotal in obtaining funds to support practice.

Framing the gifted and talented as special needs education reflects an extension of the meaning of inclusion in education policy and an expansion of the concept of special needs. Inherent in this is a top-down perspective of the 'talented and gifted' as a group of learners with 'outstanding abilities' who must be identified as a group and who is considered having special needs and for whom special provision has to be set up (Rasmussen and Lingard 2018).

In Australian policy and practice declarations, there appears to be a multiplicity of terms involved in the wider definitions of outstanding ability (Merrotsy 2015; McCann 2007). As to what is 'standing out', this generally refers to exceptional intelligence and, with reference to Flynn, the New Zealand psychologist known for the discovery of massive IQ gains from one generation to another, three important components of intelligence, including mental acuity, habits of mind and glial cells are located (Merrotsy 2015, p. 235).

As such, the state and territorial policies share some common elements in drawing widely on the same psychological bases. This involves drawing on Gagné (2008), when defining the concepts of 'giftedness' and 'talent' and on this basis concluding that outstanding mastery should be "evident in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers in the school" (Rasmussen and Lingard 2018).

Considering the identification process, it is remarkable that it is highly based on using IQ or other cognitive assessments, where testing appears at high frequency. Although pointed out in psychology-based research that standardized psychological and academic tests alone do not constitute a sufficient basis for identifying talent (Feldhusen 1998) and so need to be supplemented by qualitative data and information, it appears that in practice schools predominantly use such tests as identification measures (Callahan and Hiatt 1998; Feldhusen 1998).

As argued by Rasmussen and Lingard (2018), one reason for the dominance of cognitive tests in the talent identification process may be that using such assessment tools appears less resource-demanding than other, more qualitative methods, and perhaps has the appearance of objectivity or as being 'scientific' in their approach. Considering the multiplicity of steps in the identification process and the involvement of both several teachers and a guidance officer, this, however, appears quite resource demanding.

Another relevant point is the fact that national standardized tests in literacy and numeracy have been introduced for all students in all Australian schools in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 from 2008. This has seen an increased usage of additional standardised tests again in Australian schools as teachers seek to prepare students for the national tests and develop students' 'test literacy'. In Denmark, we have seen a similar development of teachers focusing on the development of students' 'test literacy' in the wake of the introducing national tests in 2010.

In a philosophy of science perspective, the inclusive framing of talent links with the widespread understanding that the Bell curve depicts an underlying reality in the shape of distributions between under-achieving, normal and talented students (e.g. Gottfredson 2009). In other words, the Bell curve functions as the ideal model for the distribution of test results and tests are justified by referring to their results being in accordance with the Bell curve (Ydesen 2011). For instance, the assumption mentioned above that only about 10% of the population is gifted is in congruence with the gaussian distribution. But while the debates about talent indicate a large room for evaluation and assessment because some things remain immeasurable, the mathematical principle of the gaussian distribution seem to be canonised as an ordering principle for the immeasurable factors.

Concluding Discussion: The Talent Agenda and Contemporary Education

Having analysed the three frames, it is time to revisit the question of how the need for cultivating excellence in education has been framed and justified in a landscape cutting across local context and the global education space. As we have seen, a number of different and uneven agendas and stakeholders come together as the foundation of the transnational policyscape revolving around notions on talent in education. The key components treated in this chapter are the evidence-based edu-

cation approach, the economic human capital approach and the inclusive education approach as they are in evidence in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Clearly the depiction of the policyscape is not exhaustive, but we do see a close connection with what is commonly described as neoliberal reforms including the inherent visions, values and ideology of this mode of governance. According to Pasi Sahlberg, this mode of governance can be termed the Global Education Reform movement (GERM). The GERM is an education reform approach that broadly follows the tenets of New Public Management and Neoliberalism. It is structured around a common set of policy ideas including standards-based management, performance evaluation, and accountability (Fuller and Stevenson 2019).

More specifically, the common denominators cutting across the three frames – research, economic, special needs – are the call for and orientation towards measurement technologies able to generate comparable quantitative results. In all three frames, the attraction and allure of quantification is closely married to demands for a technology able to quantify and accurately measure the usability of research, education's contribution to the economy and who is talented and who is not. Standardised tests and measurements of various kinds play into these values; they are viewed as being scientific, comparable, and empirical – or even objective. In this sense, the policyscape revolving around talent in education hinges on a human ambition to control, plan, organise, and optimize the social world; i.e. social engineering.

Each frame also spawns useful components to the rationality of neoliberal reform. It is not to say that testing or evidence-based research is a neoliberal undertaking by default, but such practices tend to provide results that are easy to use for the purpose of neoliberal reform. At the same time, important perspectives are dismissed from the policyscape. Testing and evidence-based research is in recurrent danger of undermining and limiting holistic evaluations. At a theoretical level, this is because the attraction and allure of quantification have the potential to overrule reservations about using test and research results. The temptation to compare numbers with no thought for the inherent reservations and sources of bias can be overwhelming. At the empirical level, the policyscape may even generate counter-productive or paradoxical results. For instance, the quest for social advancement through education may be undermined by the modes of governance springing from the urge to test, measure, categorise and compare. As argued convincingly by Brown and Tannock (2009) "The global war for talent promotes social, economic and educational inequality."

Following the analysis in this chapter we see a picture of talent in education being firmly integrated with the three frames, which to some extent are overlapping, but in combination constitutes a formidable policyscape with a far-reaching governance perspective. Measurement technologies with their generation of data, numbers and statistics stand central in the modes of governance in global education today (e.g. Addey 2018; Grek 2009; Nordin and Sundberg 2014; Ozga 2011).

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Chapter 9
Concluding Discussion: Talent Agendas and their Educational Implications

Introduction

The phenomenon of excellence, talent and giftedness has been a recurring concern in most education systems. As early as in 1868, William Torrey Harris (1835–1909), superintendent of public schools for St. Louis, instituted the earliest systematic efforts in public schools to educate gifted students (Jolly 2009).

Some 100 years later, the Institute on Exceptional Children at the University of Minnesota published a progress report on research related to the problem of identification, development, and utilization of talented students (Torrance 1960). As reflected in the title "Talent and Education: Present Status and Future Directions", the book was an attempt to provide state-of-the-art knowledge about talent education. Among the topics discussed were the nature and scientific measurement of talent, the effects of life experiences on the development of talent, the enrichment of school curricula, special grouping and acceleration in the schools, psychological aspects of some of the problems, and Russian methods of dealing with individual differences.

Moving some 55 years up in time, an Erasmus+ project entitled "Talent education" was in operation between 2015 and 2018 (Talent education 2019). The project comprised 18 partners from 4 cities and the purpose of the project was to develop a programme of identification, new teaching methods and a chain-oriented approach to prevent underachievement of gifted and talented.

What these three historical examples show is first and foremost a clear engagement in the effort to make the most of available human resources, but they also clearly share education as a common frame of reference. However, the concern with excellence, talent and giftedness has not only been among educators and teachers focusing on pedagogical and didactical issues. As we have seen in this book, multiple stakeholders like international organisations, governments, municipal authorities, school management, parents and the labour market also take a deep interest in the identification, cultivation, development and use of talent. In the field of research,

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economists, psychologists and sociologists have also taken a strong interest in educational talent. While the only common denominator is that education is the site tasked with addressing talent, this complex picture of talent in education implies that the field is permeated by different – sometimes even antagonistic – interests, approaches, and understandings. However, the analytical journey presented through the chapters of this book do suggest the presence of at least three recurring frames constituting the policyscape revolving around excellence and talent in education; the evidence-based approach to education research, the economic human capital approach and the inclusive education approach.

The Core Findings of the Analytical Lenses: Policyscapes, Policy Enactments and Cultivation

The analytical journey of this book has visualised how a policyscape is shaped and expanded. Inspirations and effects from different geographies, logics, and approaches merge through dynamic processes between the global and the local creating a growing field of influence in terms of our conceptualization, understanding and agency in education in general and in dealing with talent in particular. In this sense, the education political agenda of cultivating excellence and talent in the Danish case is symptomatic of wider, global education policies that coincide with performativity-oriented moves in education (Ball 2003; Rasmussen et al. 2014).

In order to achieve this insight, we employed the analytical concepts of 'policyscapes' and 'policy enactments'. While these concepts are very different in terms of their theoretical foundations, their combination proved fruitful in terms of obtaining different outlooks: A horizontal outlook (policyscapes), i.e. the position, interactions and significance of the talent agenda in the transnational landscape of education; and a vertical outlook of context (policy enactments), i.e. the transfer, translation, and transformation of policies into a local context subject to the meaning-making practices of its agents.

Using the concept of 'cultivating', as we do in the title of the book, has enabled us to focus on the ways that powerful processes are at play around the 'garden of education'. It was our intention, by drawing on the etymological understanding of cultivation to draw the reader's attention to the fact that policy makers at different levels of the education policy space are not prone to let education be a wild and weedy landscape of learning. Thus, many efforts have been made, across times and places (globally), to sow and harvest 'excellence' through education policies. We find the metaphor of the 'education system as a garden' helpful to understand the ways 'evidence-based' or 'what works' education research approaches, human capital economic approaches, and inclusive, 'special needs' approaches have been mobilised as 'effective fertilizers' to cultivate excellence in education policies and optimize the yield of talent. This metaphor also links with an ongoing dispute within psychology, whether talent in its origin derives from nature (the seed) or nurture (the gardening) (Feldhusen 1998; Winstanley 2004).

In the point of departure, we framed our purpose of analysing educational talent from education policy perspectives and the role of classification processes linked with talent policy in practice. More specifically, we asked about the understanding and practice of talent in education policies, located globally, nationally and locally. As global frameworks for education policies, we focused on the OECD – and to some extent UNESCO – and the discourses of talent in these policy arenas. Then we zoomed in on the Danish nation state to analyse, how talent has been and is understood and practiced in the Danish public education system as part of a global education space. In a continued zooming in, we focused on the enactment of current policies of talent development by means of talent classes in a local, municipal context in Denmark and asked, how talents are identified within the teaching practices of talent classes, what characterizes the pedagogies, the 'talented students' and their understandings of own talent in relation to school. Linking social background, perceptions, and motives of the students, we set up a talent typology, which enabled us to interpret social consequences of such cultivation of excellence in education. In the following, we will draw the pictures emerging from our empirical analyses.

Looking Across the Chapters: The Main Findings

From the historical analysis of the transnational OECD documents in Chap. 2, it became obvious that the purpose of education in this perspective is to discover the talented and build on their competences for the sake of economic growth. In most of the policy documents, talent has often been portrayed almost like a production factor along capital, technology, and land; as such, it is a scant resource that can be extracted from the education system. Therefore, the focus has often been on optimizing education systems and keeping them accountable for the delivery of talent. The concept of talent appears to have shifted from being a relatively static concept closely associated with a notion of a pool of natural science talent in every society needing to go through refinement in the education system in order to improve economic growth to a more dynamic concept rooted in a notion about meritocracy and a broader social question about education access.

According to the idea of lifelong learning, talent could be cultivated and developed across the lifespan of citizens. In the 1970s and into the 1980s the concept of talent became more inclusive in terms of mobilizing broader human resources associated with different demographic and social groups, and it also seems to fit specific political challenges such as the high unemployment, especially among youth, experienced by many OECD member states. In the most recent OECD documents the concept of talent is frequently left vague and undefined (Brown and Tannock 2009). But it is strongly implied that talent has do to with the frontline workers of economic growth; it is often understood along neoliberal lines, which encourage "(…) rising income inequalities and challenge the linear relationship between 'learning' and 'earning' (human capital)." (Ibid. p. 377).

There were other significant educational agendas in this period, which related to education in developing countries. They were promoted by UNESCO and built on a somewhat different understanding of talent. They took a universal approach to education rooted in a human rights perspective on education and a notion of education as holding an intrinsic value conducive to democracy and the promotion of inter-human understanding (Duedahl 2016; Elfert and Ydesen 2020). They posited a social justice perspective to education, which as coined in the Salamanca-declaration emphasised an educational inclusion perspective on talent/giftedness rather than an economic perspective.

As analysed in Chap. 3, the education policies in Denmark through the twentieth century reflected the welfare state vision of creating an educational system for all regardless of status and income. The ambition was "equality through education", and in the economic situation of full employment in the 1960s, the search was on for the "talent reserves" (Husén 1974). This necessitated a public school system, which could cultivate unexploited talent from all, including the lower, social strata more efficiently, and would require a flexible educational system in which the definitive choice between different educational streams was postponed as long as possible. The move towards an undivided school was completed with the 1993 Education Act, which abolished the remnants of streaming in the primary school. In the last part of the century, however, increased globalization and international competition caused a shift in education policy where individualization and human capital gained significant influence in education policy objectives.

International rankings and comparisons were used to legitimize the 2006 Education Act, which toned down democratic and personal education and prioritized knowledge and skills as the primary purpose in school. More goals and more measuring by means of standardised testing summarize the most important changes in the school area where the equality-minded and inclusive school was criticized for promoting mediocracy at the expense of talent. It was also in 2006 that the first funding aimed directly at talent activities in education was initiated, which resulted in various talent activities, including competitions, teacher training, and talent classes. The understanding of talent behind this agenda was making a direct link between talent development and an increase in the nation's competitiveness, which follows the OECD line of seeing education as an economic vehicle for growth in which the development of gifted and talented is crucial. One of the most commonly used references in OECD reports in this regard is the work of Erik Hanushek, a senior fellow at the conservative Hoover institute and "(…) arguably one of the most influential contemporary voices about the economics of public education policy." (Cochran-Smith et al. 2018, p. 19). There is however now a substantial literature which has rejected Hanushek's most important claims; namely that improving PISA scores improves economic growth. The relevant issue is that the OECD cannot establish causality but still promotes reforms as if it had (Auld and Morris 2016).

This widespread economic logic, however, is a move away from the focus on a rise in education levels generally to an individualising focus on students considered gifted and talented, even if the Ministry emphasizes that this focus will be of 'benefit to all' (Ministry of Education 2008a).

In the translation of the ministerial understanding at municipal level, two competing rationales stand out; talent as an economic rationale oriented towards competition and growth versus talent as a pedagogic rationale oriented towards differentiating pedagogically to encourage the talented few. Inherent in the latter orientation is that encouraging the few to learn more will also benefit the others, because of the ostensible rub-off effect. But this does not consider that nominating some students as talented indirectly means denominating the others – the majority of students – as untalented, which can be argued to have the directly opposite effect and work as a discouragement of educational progress (Sennett 2007). In the local area of the case study, the idea was subject to public debate and strong resentment to establishing full time talent classes that would separate the talents from their regular classmates. Proponents of an inclusive school that promotes the welfare state's democratic ideal of keeping students together worked to counter such ideas, which they considered elitist and going back to streaming. Partly because of this opposition, the talent classes were realised as after school classes that took place once a week after normal school hours.

As became apparent in Chap. 4, the management of the upper secondary educational institutions had their own market-oriented agendas for participating in the project and hosting talent classes. The managers considered an investment in future students in the interest of the institutions because of the so-called structural reform, leading to the abolishment of the counties and to bigger municipalities but which also meant that the upper secondary educational institutions transformed into self-governing institutions more exposed to market conditions. An important consequence of this development was that institutions now had to compete to attract as many students as possible to increase their market share and economic power. The talent agenda could help them profile their institutions to new and attractive student groups, and thus in a very direct sense played into the neoliberal reform of privatisation and self-governance.

The participating teachers had different interests depending on their institutional and educational affiliation. The upper secondary school teachers typically seemed less inclined to cooperation with other teachers in the project because they found it too time consuming. They had become involved in it due to the perspectives of new professional challenges, possibilities of competence development, and the professional satisfaction "to teach a group of students who participated voluntarily and wanted to be there", as they phrased it. Both groups of teachers shared such motives, but they generally viewed the purpose of the talent class project differently as to its social dimension. The lower secondary school teachers generally attached greater emphasis on the social dimension, which was in accordance with the ideas of the original project associating talent with a general interest in the school subjects, linked together by social activities. They were also in greater favour of teacher collaboration on the project than were the upper secondary school teachers. In contrast, the upper secondary school teacher appeared to attach more emphasis on the academic dimension, while some teachers within each group also expressed opposite views. Further, they expressed similar interests to their managers in using the talent classes to attract future students to their educational institutions and in this way considering them as an opportunity of marketization.

In the recruitment of students for the talent classes, analysed in Chap. 5, it became obvious that self-selection played a major role. This goes for both the first year's project, which applied both written applications and a testing procedure in its selection process, as for the second year's talent classes, which applied only self-selection. It was therefore quite important how the students viewed talent and considered themselves as talents, as this was the foundation for their application and acceptance in the talent class. The identification of talent played out along distinctions of their performances in school as measured by grades and test results on the one hand, and potentials for possibilities of developing talents as judged (in not measurable ways) by their teachers, parents, and themselves. This raises the question if talent should and can be subject to objective measurement or, as conceptualised by Ferrari (2003), should it be judged against a normative standard shaped by the cultural-normative dynamic which means that the criteria for talent will also change according to culture (Philipson and McCann 2007).

The social background of the students in the talent classes generally proved to be characterised by high amounts of social, cultural, especially educational, and economic capital (Bourdieu 1997). The parents had considerably higher levels of education than most people did in this part of the country. In comparison with other parents in the local area, there was a much higher proportion of the parents of talent class students, who had higher education. Some were very involved in social and political work, and generally, they took strong interest in the schooling of their children. Based on their education levels and occupations, the talent class families belonged to the social groups whose socio-economic status can be characterised as high (Nærvig Petersen and Nielsen 2008). The talent class students were also characterised by attending many after school activities such as music and sports and in this sense by cultural capital, which allowed them to move naturally within and across many different contexts (cf. Lareau 2000).

Viewing the different understandings of talent in relation to social backgrounds, the analysis showed clear links between the ways the talent class students viewed their own talent and the background, which produced it. The four types of talents dealt with in the analysis included *the distinguished talent*, *the quiet talent*, *the versatile talent* and *the industrious talent*. The distinguished talent expressed an almost inherent talent and a feeling of always finding learning easy – it just seems natural. The quiet talent had a drive for being social and attached great importance to the social conditions in connection with learning and talent development. The versatile talent was aware of the importance of being broadly oriented while pursuing education at a high level and thus achieving a good position in society. The industrious talent experienced talent as something requiring effort and struggle, for which reason this type stood out as particularly competitive.

Whether the talent class students perceived talent as 'things come easy to me' or that it involved a struggle and hard work, the qualitative analysis of the empirical material clearly showed a link to their cultural capital in the family. Thus, the *distinguished* and *versatile* talents had accumulated cultural capital in an embodied state – they are familiar with it as such, as an embodiment – which therefore appears as natural and inherent. They do not perceive it as a work of acquisition because this has taken place over a long time (not reduced to the length of schooling) and has

become an integral part of them. The quiet and industrious talents, in contrast, are relatively unfamiliar with the talent, which do not appear to them in the same obvious ways as to the previously mentioned types. They are more prone to describe it as a particular interest and strong school efforts, which are necessary to develop for those not equipped with the 'head start' provided by embodied cultural capital.

Teaching in the talent classes, according to the analyses in Chap. 6, appeared to be more pupil-centred than in the students' regular school classes. Thus, the talent class lessons were characterised by both teachers and students as being more active and student having more influence over content, and even allowing for 'learning by doing' or experiments. Then the conditions of the talent class also differed substantially from the regular conditions of school life, having no fixed curriculum nor decisive exams at the end. It also differed from the conditions dominating regular school by the smaller and more homogenous student group in class. Whereas the size of an average school class in Denmark is about 20 and legislation even allows up to 28 students in a class, there were about 15 students in each talent class, which meant more teacher time for each student, and everyone was there by choice. These conditions allowed for greater freedom of movement and room for student influence. Using Bernstein's theoretical framework, the talent classes were characterized by weak framing. In a broader sense, teaching in the talent classes followed a slow-paced and expensive *competence model*, not the inexpensive *performance model* generally found in lower secondary school (Bernstein 2000).

The weak framing, however, was combined with strong classification, as lessons were taught within traditional boundaries of school subjects; each subject being taught by one teacher, with little or no cooperation between the teachers and hardly any interdisciplinary work. This strong classification and understanding of knowledge prevailed among all of the talent class teachers, but especially so among the upper secondary school teachers for whom talent development equalled the development of pupil potentials within school subject-specific areas. Thus, the actual talent class lessons in structure did not appear substantially different from ordinary lessons, but the participants still perceived the lessons as special and attached to them associations of opportunity.

Interviews with teachers from the talent class students' home schools indicate that the issue of talent development within the frames of the Danish public school is a controversial issue. As pointed out in Chap. 7, some teachers support the idea of talent classes because they find that talented students need offers like the talent classes that allow them to be around likeminded. However, they also mention that it may create problems if this takes place within the framework of the students' own school where it may cause envy among their peers. Identifying talent among students may have a two-way exclusionary effect, since children who are selected may risk social exclusion in relation to their class mates. Regardless of whether ability-based selection is voluntary or based on tests, it seems, based on the talent class projects, to imply a social selection as well.

If anything, the analyses in the chapters of this book show that talent is not an unequivocal phenomenon. It carries with it discursive, economic, pedagogic, didactical, social, and psychological dimensions. The handling of talent in education – be that in terms of policy or practice – must reflect this complexity and take into

account the impact and repercussions of the chosen paths. But the analyses of this book also indicate the presence of distorted priorities lending the lion's share to economic concerns. In a wider perspective, this observation is also reflected in what Tomlinson (2008) has called a 'one-dimensional understanding of the world economy'; i.e. the individualization of success and failure combined with a vague and opaque idea about material progress. An important sociological point in this respect is that classification practices in education, including the identification of talent, correspond to elite tastes (consumption), associations, and dispositions that provide the bases of inequality.

Thus, the policies and practices surrounding talent in education is in perpetual danger of reinforcing such a one-dimensional economic understanding and thus reproducing social inequalities. As such, our study clearly shows how the new policy for selecting talented students deconstructs the compromise from which the comprehensive school was built to induce equal opportunities with a common curriculum. Today, the internal differentiation of education systems based on school choice tends to widen the inequality gap between pupils. This is further widened by new assessment techniques promoted by international organizations subscribing to notions of human capital investment.

That takes us back to the main points of Chap. 8 presented in the beginning of this concluding discussion about the policyscape revolving around talent consisting of an evidence-based approach to education research, an economic human capital approach, and an inclusive education approach.

While the patterns and workings of this policyscape can be difficult to address from a contemporary perspective, we have argued that the combination of sociological, empirical and historical analyses to guide our understanding of talent in education can provide important findings about the nature of inequality and its symbolic reproduction in education. Just like C.F. Goodey (2011) has investigated the historical constructions of intellectual disability it could be fruitful to pursue the same research track with the history of the talented or gifted.

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