

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

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 time-tabled 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 place 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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