

High achievers and gifted students in Swedish compulsory schools curricula, the 1960's to the 1980's.

During the 21st-century, the question of high achievers and gifted students' learning has received increased attention in both pedagogical research and educational debate in Sweden. This article analyzes how the so-called formulation arena reasoned about and viewed these students' educational- and school situation, and what opportunities for organizational and pedagogical differentiation the mandatory school's curricula specified and recommended during the 1960's to the 1980's. The article uses a qualitative text analysis, and the theoretical framework is based on the concepts of curriculum, giftedness, high ability and organizational and pedagogical differentiation. Previous pedagogical and psychological research has often claimed that high-achievers and particularly gifted students have been ignored by decision-makers and school curricula. In the article, that image is problematized. Instead, it is demonstrated that Swedish curricula throughout the 20th-century, and especially during the first three decades of the cohesive compulsory school from the 1960s to the 1980s, provided good opportunities for, in fact demanded, organizational and pedagogical differentiation, based on – for example - students' achievements, interests and giftedness. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that those statements in the compulsory schools' curricula had roots in the two previous curricula of 1919 and 1955, and that those methods were strongly recommended by both contemporary pedagogical research and school commissions. In conclusion, contemporary statements and views – from researchers, teachers, parents, media and so on – are nuanced. Instead, it is demonstrated that also in Sweden when the democratic, unifying compulsory school system was designed and developed, the authorities took severe consideration and interest in the learning process of gifted and highly able students. What happened in the actual schools is quite a different matter, and beyond the scope of the article.

Keywords: high achievers/highly able students, giftedness, educational history, curriculums, organizational and pedagogical differentiation.