

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN GIFTED EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY FROM SWEDEN

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# CONTEXT

International Baccalaureate in a Swedish public school.



# International Baccalaureate (IB)



Model inquiry and continually inquire into their teaching practices and learning processes of students as a source of professional development	Support thinking and metacognition (thinking about thinking) with prompts and tools	Implement hands-on learning, recognizing that a child's hands, eyes and ears are infinite sources of discovery	Scaffold connected opportunities for the development of skills	Create flexible and engaging learning spaces that promote independence and collaboration	Provide time for learners to wonder, explore, build and revise theories, engage in research and reflect on learning
Value students as capable inquirers	Are open-minded about the process of inquiry, using conceptual understandings to anchor sustained investigations	<h1 style="margin: 0;">Inquiry teachers</h1>		Extend learning with open-ended questions or problems	Use prior knowledge as launching point for new learning
Engage curiosity through meaningful learning engagements to launch and re-launch conceptual investigations	Use real world contexts and primary experiences as significant activators of learning			Personalise learning by employing a range of strategies and flexible groupings	Understand the importance of collaborative learning and value the contributions of both individuals and groups
Reserve whole-class experiences for meaningful instructional, collaborative and reflective moments	Support students to make deliberate connections within and between subjects	Consider materials, fieldtrips, learning engagements as stimuli for inquiry	Generate routines, questions, strategies and systems that can be transferred across a range of contexts	Monitor and document learning providing meaningful feedback throughout	Measure the products of learning against established success criteria

Source: [Learning and teaching - International Baccalaureate®](#) (Accessed June 13, 2025).

# IB and Gifted Education

- ∴ The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM, Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli and Reis, 1985, 1997) inquiry-based instruction, metacognition, individual projects, community service (Carber and Reis, 2004)
- ∴ The Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM, VanTassel-Baska, 1986, 1995, 2018, 2022) advanced content knowledge, higher-order thinking and processing, learning experiences focused on major issues, themes and ideas
- ∴ Ability grouping (Brody, 2023), above-level assessments (Johnsen and VanTassel-Baska, 2023)
- ∴ Strong positive effects for academic acceleration (Rogers, 2015)

# Action Research

A process in which practitioners "gather evidence about their practices and critique assumptions, beliefs and values embedded in them". (Elliott, 2000, p. 209)

# Period: August 2022 - ongoing

**Aim:** develop and implement the Highly Able program at ISSR

## **Iterative cycles and processes**

Cycle 1: What is going on in the Highly Able program?

Cycle 2: What works in the Highly Able program and how do we know it?

Cycle 3: What aspects of the Highly Able program need to be refined and how?

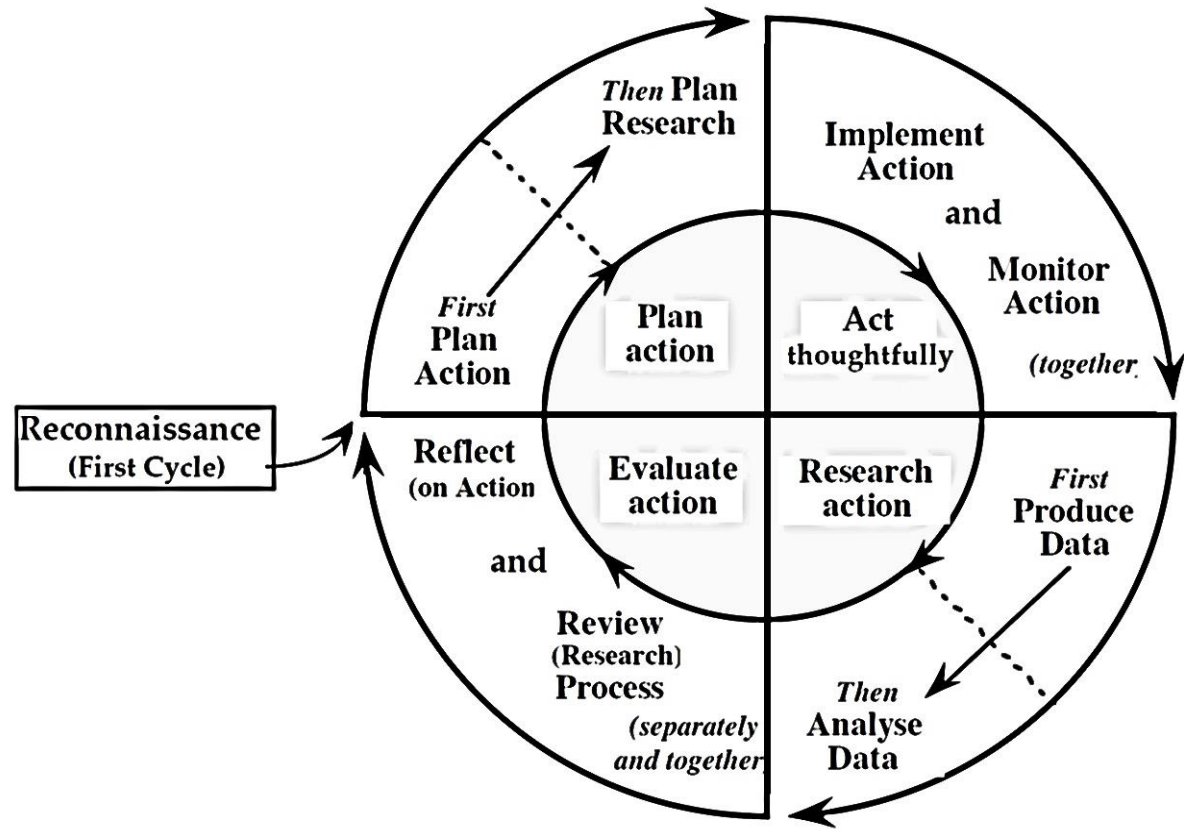
# Methodology

Action research

Reflective journal

- What am I doing?
- Why am I doing this?
- How am I doing it?

Data triangulation (Denzin, 1989)



The action research cycle (Tripp, 1995, 2005)

# Cycle 1: What is going on in the Highly Able program?

Questions:

Q1: How does the Highly Able program interact with the IB and the Swedish context?

Q2: What are the underpinning theories of the Highly Able program?

*Q3: What are the goals and the core components of the Highly Able program?*

### Q3: What are the goals and the core components of the Highly Able program?

**Goals:** understand, identify and address the academic/educational and social emotional needs of highly able students, including those who are twice- or multi-exceptional.

**Core components:** *Professional learning*, Differentiation, Enrichment, Equitable identification, Support for twice- and multi-exceptional students, Collaboration with parents and local community.

# Professional Learning

As gifted education is not included in most ITE programs, PD plays an important role in developing educators' knowledge and pedagogy regarding gifted education. (Townend, Jolly and Chew, 2024, p. 97).

Professional Development	Professional Learning	Professional Learning for Educators of the Gifted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning to serve one’s own growth</li> <li>• Development happens</li> <li>• Expectations are developed by others</li> <li>• Top down</li> <li>• One size fits all</li> <li>• Sit and get workshops or training</li> <li>• One shot deal</li> <li>• Lacks teacher input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning how to better serve students</li> <li>• Growth in practice</li> <li>• Active engagement, teacher voice</li> <li>• Creation and collaboration</li> <li>• Equity outcomes</li> <li>• Holistic</li> <li>• Culturally responsive</li> <li>• Inquiry and reflection</li> <li>• Engages teachers in authentic, valuable learning experiences</li> <li>• Driven by the needs of teachers and their students</li> <li>• Implementation of <i>Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning how to serve the unique needs and talents of learners who are gifted</li> <li>• Priority on underrepresented groups and collaboration</li> <li>• Addition of psychosocial to socio-emotional development</li> <li>• Emphasis on differentiated curriculum including advanced content and instruction</li> <li>• Addresses pace, depth, and complexity, need for acceleration, and interests of the student</li> <li>• Emphasis on methodologies of disciplines for development of expertise</li> <li>• Focus on equity and inclusion</li> <li>• Training in <i>NAGC-CEC Gifted Education Teacher Preparation Standards (2013)</i></li> <li>• Implementation of <i>NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards (2019)</i></li> <li>• Application of the <i>Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education (WCGTC, 2021)</i></li> </ul>

Adapted by Weber and Mofield, 2023, p. 46, from Weber and Novak, 2022

# Features of Effective Professional Development

“...structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes.”

1. Content-focused
2. Incorporates active learning
3. Supports collaboration
4. Uses models of effective practice
5. Provides coaching and expert support
6. Offers feedback and reflection
7. Sustained duration

(Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 4)

# Guiding Principles: Professional Learning in Gifted Education

Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education (WCGTC, 2021): *Tiered Content, Evidence-based, Holistic, Broad, Equitable, Comprehensive, Integral, Ongoing, Sustainable, Empowering*

Guiding Principles in Developing Equity-Driven Professional Learning in Gifted Education (Nowak, Lewis and Weber, 2020): *Taking a Pulse, Individualizing Professional Learning Plans, Establishing a Safe Zone, Going Beyond the Tip of the Iceberg, Bridging the Gap between School and Home, Identifying Grows and Glows, Engaging in Courageous Conversations*

# DEIA and Professional Learning in Gifted Education

Seven thematic issue areas of gifted education (Siegle, Hook and Wright, 2024)

DEIA “is *the* chief area of concern of our field” (p. 180)

Need for teacher training to work with gifted education (rank 6th)

“...education professionals need learning experiences that address strategies for recognizing student potential and flexible options for adjusting instruction to maximize that potential.” (Meyer, Shem and Plucker, 2024, p. 38)

# Professional learning: Timeline

Academic year  
2022-2023

1. **Presentation** (in-service, lecture), 23 November 2022
2. **Workshop** (in-service, collaborative): How to differentiate for student readiness using the Equalizer (Tomlinson, 1999), 9 January 2023
3. **Coaching** (30 minutes/session) February-June 2023
4. **Study circle** (small group, interest based, monthly meeting, with K-W-L chart) February-June 2023

Academic year  
2023-2024

1. **Online course** (Moodle, self-paced): EGIFT: European Gifted Education Training – An Erasmus+ Funded Project (highability.eu), September 2023-June 2024
2. **Follow-up workshop**: Teacher nomination, 22 November 2023
3. **Reflection**, 1 February 2024
4. **Study circle**, September-December 2023

Academic year  
2024-2025

1. **End of online course feedback and task**, 9 August 2024
2. **Update unit planners**, ongoing
3. **Individualized support**, ongoing

# Workshop: How to differentiate for student readiness using the Equalizer (Tomlinson, 1999)

**Workshop: In-service, all staff, collaborative, January 2023**

Step 1: 30 minutes

- Individually/in pairs, think of two students that you currently teach, one with less developed readiness and one with more developed readiness.
- Choose at least two Equalizer controls and design a short task for each of these students.

Step 2: 30 minutes

- Share and discuss your task in the group.
- Individually, write down at least one learning point/new idea.

**Coaching** (February-June 2023), 30 minutes/session

# Study Circle

- Small group, interest based, monthly, February – June 2023
- 6 participants (teachers, learning support staff, school counsellor)
- K-W-L chart (Ogle, 1986) to monitor learning and reflection
- Individualized guidance offered by the study circle leader
- Topics

Terminology, theoretical framework

Twice exceptional learners and underachievement

Social emotional characteristics of highly able students

Curricular considerations for twice-exceptional students

# Online Learning: eGift

- All staff (teachers, support staff) September 2023 - June 2024
- Online course: EGIFT: European Gifted Education Training – An Erasmus+ Funded Project ([highability.eu](http://highability.eu))
- Self-paced with embedded follow-up workshop and reflection in-service
- Content
  - Strand 1: Identification
  - Strand 2: Lived experience
  - Strand 3: Social and emotional wellbeing
  - Strand 4: Teaching strategies
  - Strand 5: Programme design principles (optional)

# Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Teacher reflection: 28 respondents, February 2024

Six phases (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2019)

Inductive coding

Themes:

- Twice-exceptional students and diversity
- Identification and characteristics of students with high abilities
- Differentiation and other strategies in the inclusive classroom
- Theoretical foundations in gifted education

# Lessons learned [1]

## Reflective journal (August 2022 – ongoing)

1. **Organization** (Equitable, Comprehensive, Integral, Ongoing, Sustainable, Empowering)
  - Use a whole-school approach, aligned with other school priorities and staff interest
  - Monitor, follow-up and evaluate systematically
  - Plan over a long period of time and during in-service days
  - Assign staff to coordinate PL, ideally set up a team
  - Value school leadership support and in-house expertise
  - Elicit staff, student and parent feedback
  - Consider the technological aspects of Learning Management Systems

# Lessons learned [2]

## **2. Type of learning format** (Tiered content, Evidence-based, Holistic, Broad)

- Engage the staff in a thoughtful mix of learning experiences (lecture, collaborative workshop, coaching, study circle, online learning etc.)

## **3. Time** (Ongoing, Sustainable)

- Allow time for reflection, application/transfer of knowledge and skills, collaboration and sharing of practices

## **4. Critical friend/s**

## Lessons learned [3]

“I like the fact that we are dividing this task over the academic year. This is a good approach to encouraging some extra PD for staff. I feel that many of the things I am learning are reinforcing strategies that I have previously learnt. It is good to know that I am on the right track. That the practical solutions I am attempting in class appear to be backed up by research.”

“I am more aware of the different needs of my students as a result of these studies and have been more aware of paying attention to different needs within the classroom.”

“I have learned a lot, especially as being part of the reading group...”

“I wonder why we go so deep into a topic that none of my colleagues perceive as the main challenge in their teaching?”

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# THANK YOU!

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# Q&A

