Identifications Of The Gifted: The Efficacy Of Teacher Nominations Within The Area Of Haringey In North London, England – A Follow Up Study On The Work Of Dr. Tom Balchin

Mario Maxwell Müller

University Of Pretoria
Music Department, Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract: This research project will be a follow up study of the work of Dr Tom Balchin's from the University of Brunel and his research Identifications of the gifted: the efficacy of teacher nominations. The focus of this research particularly was to concentrate on the twelve schools in the borough council of Haringey, North London in the United Kingdom. The aim of this study was to evaluate and discuss teachers' perceptions with a level of consistency in which ways students are identified as G & T with several factors influencing their judgements and proposing what should actually be in place in order to assist schools to make provision and enhance support for students who are identified as G & T. This is a qualitative study, designed to reveal the perspective and opinions of teachers and Co-ordinators related to G & T, and to expose significant areas for further research.

Keywords: British, creativity, English educational system, gifted, musicality, policy, skills, talented, UK

I. INTRODUCTION

As music teachers we sometimes find it extremely difficult to identify a student who portrays any characteristics that might be classified as 'gifted and talented', as we focus so much on assessment for learning, completing the curriculum and preparing students for the annual internal/external examinations. How do we actually prepare our lessons keeping in mind that some of our students might actually feel less challenged academically in class? Do we cater for their needs and allow them to achieve their full potential in our subjects or do we act as bystanders and allow our educational systems to rule us? The core problem is that many teachers in South Africa and Britain find that they have less time to spend and concentrate on the quality teaching due to excessive paper work needing to be completed for Ofsted inspections, annual grade reviews, outcomes based education and finally reports outlining specific data related to students' progress, targets and achievements. The following research hopes to enlighten and assist teachers with the correct teaching guides in order to perform tasks and allow such identified students to prosper and reach their full potential educationally.

II. BACKGROUND

A great concern arises with regard to the policies that are in place for students who are identified as gifted and talented within schools in the United Kingdom. This is a constant phenomenon with certain students being challenged because of their cultural background and level of diversity (Cultural Issues and gifted and talented pupils, 2006: 3). As a research paper of Rollock (2005: 17) interviewing a staff member notes: "There are some children in [a] school who because they

fit the look of an academically successful child, yeah, often quite hard working, always does the work on time; they are labelled as being the gifted ones, the very academically able ones".

The focus of his research (Rollock, 2005) was on the perceptions of the 'successful pupil' in a secondary school with a significant black population. Was this a reflection of cultural competences associated with a 'good' or 'outstanding' student within a school? I disagree, as I feel one should not judge a student's performance academically with reference to their ethnicity. Many researchers (Balchin 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Clarke 2006; Freeman 1998; Gillborn&Youdell 2000; Leyden 1998) supported developing further studies into this field and made positive contributions to the area for the identification for the 'Gifted and Talented' (G & T) programmes within the British Educational system.

The common problem that exists is the delivery of a proper music policy for the G & T students within most schools in Britain. The way teachers plan, deliver, prepare, execute, cater for and implement numerous programmes to accommodate students showing great potential of being listed G & T in England is inadequate.

III. AIM

This research aims to provide a clear understanding of the current education system with reference to the programmes available for the students who are listed as G & T prospective candidates in the area of Haringey. Secondly it aims to evaluate teachers' perceptions with a level of consistency in which ways students are identified as G & T with several factors influencing their judgements and proposing what should actually be in place in order to assist schools to make provision and enhance support for students who are identified as G & T.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is of the nature of participatory which constitutes action research. This study overall is based on one research instrument, the detailed questionnaire. Mouton (2002: 150) states that studies involving the subjects of research (research participants) use mainly qualitative methods in order to gain an insight into life-worlds of research participants. This includes action research in classrooms and schools with the use of documents. O'Brien (2001: 3) confirms that with this type of research study the problem ensures the intervention systematically and is informed by the theoretical considerations. McNiff et al. (2002: 15) mention that "Action research is a name given to a particular way of researching your own learning". They continue "Action research involves learning in and through action and reflection". This includes social and caring sciences, education, organisation, administration and management (McNiff et al. 2002: 15). Ferrance (2000: ii) describes within her introduction that action research is undertaken in a school setting. It is a reflective process that allows for inquiry and discussion as components of the "research". McNiff et al. (2010: 18) explains that "Action research involves improving practice through collaborative learning." This research is performed within a particular social situation (McNiff et al. 2010: 18).

V. FINDINGS

The data provided from the twelve schools were from well-experienced teachers and some newly qualified teachers as well. The data revealed by response to the preliminary questions (mostly about the schools and the Co-ordinators) follow in order to support and understand the current educational situation in the UK. The questions 1-5 are presented, together with supporting qualitative data. A discussion of the implications of this data is linked into this section, for purposes of readability. Each school was asked to note its ethnic majority. As might be expected with a national sample, 86% of the schools identified their dominant ethnic majority as white and British. The largest other dominant ethnic groups (shown as percentages of the sample) where Asian (4%) and black African (10%).

The chart on the next page (see figure 1) indicates that in the UK teacher nominations are the most popular way to gather data towards G & T identifications. In this sample, 30% of the secondary schools G & T Co-ordinators used this method, before and other, as their number one preference for gathering data. Students' past work and portfolios (21%) are the next most popular methods. Followed by academic testing (17%), end of term year/reports (10%), IQ testing (7%), and creativity testing (5%), out of school reports (4%), peer nominations (3%), students' self-nominations and parental nominations(1%).
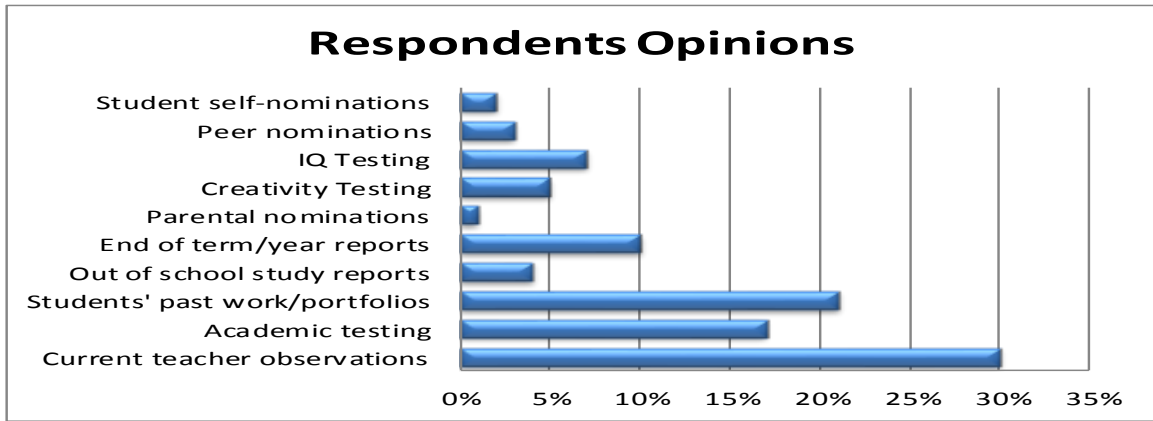
Fig. 1 – The top sources of information/evidence the respondents use in their own practice to identify G & T students

The next chart (see figure 2) highlights the five most ineffective sources that respondents have identified that they therefore do not use for identifying a potential student who is G & T. The ones the teachers identified were creativity testing (60%), out of school reports (28%), peer nomination (6%), parent nominations (4%) and student self-nominations (2%).
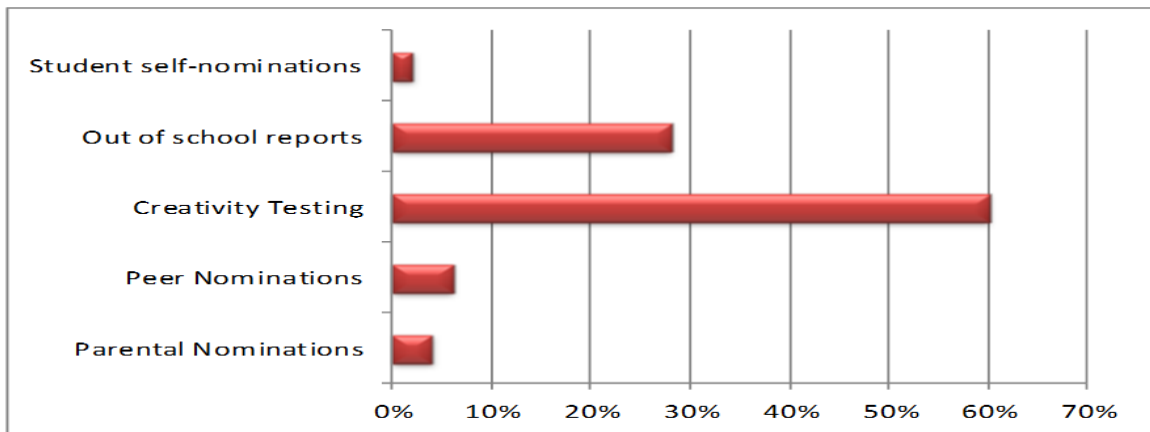

Fig. 2 – The five most ineffective sources the respondents identified which they therefore do not use when making provision and identifying sources of information for G & T students.

The answers to Questions 2-5

Around 80% of the respondents answered Yes to Question 2 – Do they think that teacher nominations are reliable? (see figure 3) 20% of the sample agreed No.
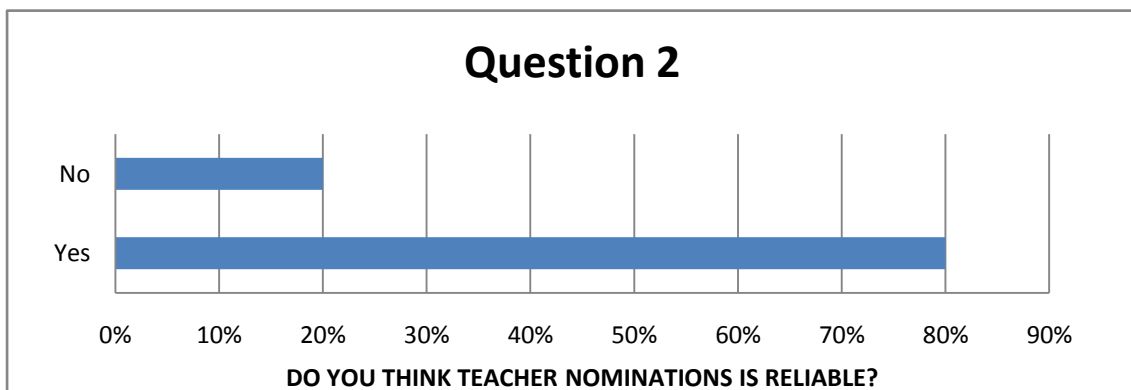

Fig. 3 – Respondents' answers to Question 2

The majority of the respondents, 60%, agreed to No for Question 3 – Could you always identify a G & T student from a class of students? The remaining 40% agreed to yes to the question.
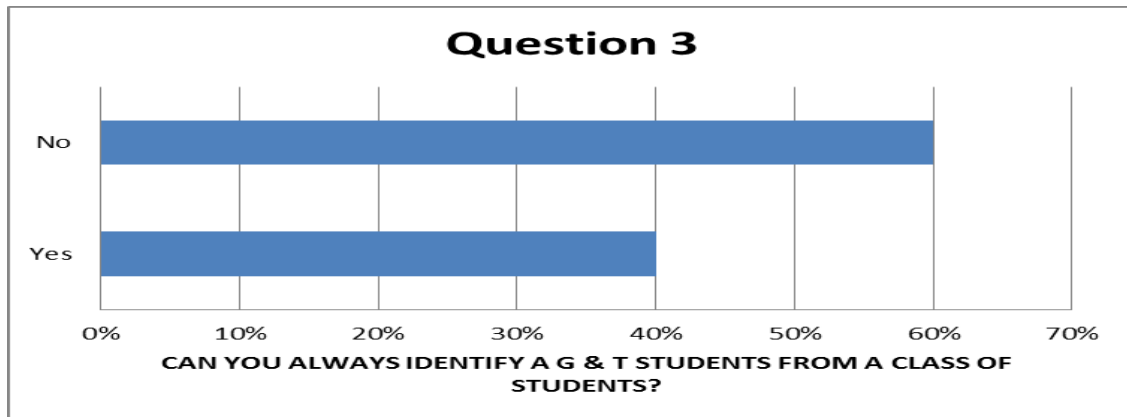

Fig. 4 – Respondents' answers to Question 3

Question 4 – Do you always find it a difficult task to identify and make provision for a student who is G & T? 60% of the sample agreed yes and 40% agreed no (see figure 5).
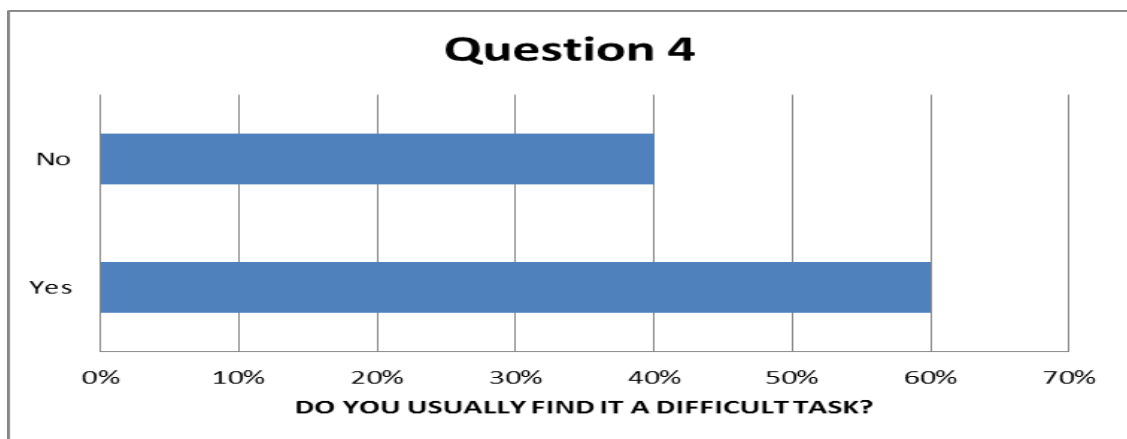

Fig. 5 – Respondents' answers to Question 4

Question 5 – What is the single issue that can most prevent teachers from nominating a potentially G & T student?

The respondents felt that the following factors influenced and prevented teachers from nominating correctly:

- The CAT scores.
- Teachers needed a better understanding of the systems in school.
- Inadequate infrastructure in place to propose students.
- Time was a major issue for most to identify these students correctly.

The main research question – To what extent is there consistency in the way students are identified by subject teachers for the G & T provision in Britain?

VI. CONCLUSION

This study revealed a widespread confusion with the concept of G & T in schools. It gave an excellent picture of how Co-ordinators were struggling to justify the Government's view of G & T education in their schools and colleges. The majority of the Co-ordinators agreed that teacher nominations were the best way of accessing detailed information about the character of the various students that they needed. It was also agreed that most Co-ordinatorsrealised that the nominations usually came from colleagues who were not trained to recognise gifted behaviour. Most teachers were merely coping with lack of funding and curriculum flexibility issues. Others were not formally given an allocated time in their work schedules to fully complete their jobs with the necessary skills requires of a G & T Co-ordinator.

The qualitative data from the study revealed that Co-ordinators felt that to gain further insight concerning whether a student was really identified as gifted or not, they all needed more information from more objective tests. This was necessary to avoid relying so much on teacher nominations. This was in line with the findings of Balchin's research (Balchin 2007b: 33).

This study concludes that in most British schools in the UK that some subject teachers may well be expected to be inconsistent and unreliable nominators of G & T. This will change once sufficient training has been supplied by the Head teachers. The Co-ordinators wanted help possibly through outside agencies for generic training programmes for staff.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

As Dr.Balchin suggested in his research (Balchin 2007b: 35) the need for an online program with appropriate training programmes with sufficient published articles is imperative. The internet is the most accessible information transfer medium for training programmes intended for G & T.

Most teachers, if they created a forum online with blogs, could actively participate and share ideas and information around the necessary provisions to be made for students who were listed G & T. This can be an active channel of communication for others to share recent research publications, articles, books, journals, teaching methodologies, theories and practices of others.

- Planning plays an imperative role when making provision for a student who is G & T.
- Implementing the following will serve as a recommendation.
- Check national registry for those listed G & T.
- Liaise with other schools co-ordinators in your borough council/local authority.
- Ensure that provisions are made within your lessons plans.
- Ensure making differentiation by input – cater for those students who feel less challenged academically in class.
- For example, extra worksheets at hand when delivering a music lesson.
- Have extracurricular activities including music clubs, for those students to excel further in their field of studies in music.
- Create a blog or forum for students to engage with each other through means of social networks. For example a GCSE – Music History Club on Facebook for students to share their ideas, opinions and suggestions.
- Check with other colleagues to see whether there are other development programmes where students can join to explore their musical talent.

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