

The Education of Gifted Children in Canadian Law and Ministerial Policy*

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Canadian laws and policies on the education of gifted and talented children invite comparison. Ministry officials in a first group of jurisdictions (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba and Yukon) say they have no specific laws or policies on gifted education. A second group (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories) offer specific Ministerial policies on gifted education. The third group, Saskatchewan and Ontario, have specific legislative statements on gifted education.

Il est intéressant de comparer les lois et politiques relatives à l'éducation des enfants doués au Canada. Les fonctionnaires des ministères de l'Éducation de Terre-Neuve, de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, du Manitoba et du Yukon affirment ne pas avoir des lois ou de politiques spéciales ayant trait à l'éducation des enfants doués. La Nouvelle-Écosse, le Nouveau-Brunswick, le Québec, l'Alberta, la Colombie Britannique et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest se sont tous dotés de politiques ministérielles précises sur la douance alors que la Saskatchewan et l'Ontario ont édicté des lois sur l'éducation des doués.

Ten years ago (1977 Autumn) the Canadian Teacher Federation held two regional colloquia on "Helping the Gifted: An Investment for the Future." These conferences illustrated our lack of knowledge about the status of the education of gifted students in Canada. Three years later, the Federation published the results of a study on the education of gifted and talented students in Canada. In their report, Borthwick, Dow, Lévesque and Banks (1980) indicated that the school acts of only two provinces, namely Ontario and Saskatchewan, specifically provided for education of gifted students. Have those legislation provisions been revised since 1980? Have other provinces or territories enacted legislation on gifted and talented learners? Have Ministry-level administrative policies on appropriate provisions for gifted and talented persons been developed in the 1980s?

In the first group (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba and Yukon), Ministry officials indicated that there are no specific policies on

* The author wishes to express his appreciation to persons in the provincial and territorial Departments of Education for their assistance in identifying documents, and to the Conseil de recherche de l'université de Moncton for the research grant which supported this study.

gifted education. In the second (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories), there are specific Ministry-level administrative policy statements on education of gifted children. The third group, Saskatchewan and Ontario, have specific legislation on gifted education.

Any public policy on education of gifted persons should concern itself with the protection of appropriate education, with special resources, and with specific procedures (Higgins & Barresi, 1979). This understanding of policy provides a framework for comparative analysis.

PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES WITH NO SPECIFIC POLICIES ON THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Newfoundland

In Newfoundland, concerned parents have argued that the Department of Education ought urgently to develop policies and programs for the gifted and talented students of Newfoundland and Labrador. Department of Education functionaries say a committee chaired by a staff person from the Division of Special Education is to prepare such a policy.

Prince Edward Island

In Prince Edward Island, the director of the Program Development Division said that the province has no written policies on education of the gifted. However, the director described the following as practices that help gifted students: well-stocked school libraries, provision in senior high school of enriched courses, permission to enrol in more than the average number of courses, and early admission (from grade 11) to the University of Prince Edward Island.

Manitoba

In Manitoba, according to the Acting Director of Curriculum Development and Implementation, education of gifted children forms a part of regular programs, since new curriculum guides give scope beyond that required for basic programs. In this flexible approach, implementation is a school-division responsibility and programs vary among divisions. No Ministry document or policy manual names these arrangements "policy." A study of the new curricula would clarify whether specific resources (personnel, programs, activities, and extra funds) and procedures are in place to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners.

Yukon

Yukon did not provide information on its policy. We interpreted lack of response as likelihood that there is no written policy on the issue.

In these four jurisdictions the absence of Ministry-level policy does not necessarily imply the absence of appropriate education for the gifted and talented learner. Appropriate programming could depend on a specific teacher, school or school board. Still, there is no affirmative Ministerial action to assure that school units (in Prince Edward Island), school divisions (in Manitoba), school boards (in Newfoundland) or schools (in Yukon) offer appropriate education for gifted students.

PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES WITH MINISTRY POLICIES ON THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN

The Department or Ministry of Education in six provinces or territories identified specific written policy statements on gifted education at their level of governance. They are Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories.

Nova Scotia

According to a study of special education administrative policies in the Province of Nova Scotia, gifted and talented students are not deemed "exceptional children." In consequence, school boards do not receive special education grants on their account (Robicheau, 1985). Policy on public school programs, however, encourages school districts to offer programs for gifted and talented. The policy statement is as follows:

Gifted/Talented Students

Administrators should make every reasonable effort to ensure that individual students who display superior academic, musical, artistic, linguistic, or physical abilities, are given the opportunity to develop these abilities. Special classes are not usually necessary nor in most cases practical, but personalized individual programs are both encouraged and supported. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1986, p. 13)

This is the only specific mention of gifted students. Details of policy execution are left to school boards. This Ministerial policy recognizes the special needs of gifted and talented pupils, but does not guarantee that appropriate education will be available, nor that specific resources and procedures will assure that "individual students [with superior abilities] are given the opportunity to develop these abilities." A review of the policy manual (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1986) does, however, encourage organization of

activities that take into account individual differences, needs, abilities and interests. Optional topics are offered in program and course descriptions in the sciences. At the high school level, school boards could offer programs at level 5 in mathematics and science (biology, chemistry and physics) when the number of students justify them.

In Nova Scotia gifted and talented learners' needs are acknowledged, but neither individualized programs nor appropriate educational programs or services are guaranteed.

New Brunswick

In New Brunswick, the Office for Governmental Reform recently prepared documents with the objective of improving the quality of education. Having acknowledged the importance of gifted learners' needs, both the Secteur des Services Francophones d'Éducation and the Anglophone Educational Services Division prepared a ministry policy on giftedness. In 1986 March an internal committee of the French Division completed an orientation document to guide official policy on high school education ("L'éducation au secondaire"). The document recognized that students' capacities and learning styles vary, and that teaching must vary accordingly. The document recommends enrichment of the regular curriculum (Ministère de l'éducation du Nouveau-Brunswick, 1986). In 1986 Fall, the French Division formed an advisory committee on giftedness to discuss the Ministry document. In the English Division an internal committee was recently formed to prepare a working document on giftedness. The *New Brunswick Schools Act* makes no specific provision for students with special needs except those mentally retarded, or visually or hearing impaired. Revision to the *Schools Act* has been promised (*New Brunswick Schools Act*, 1973).

Quebec

In 1981, Quebec's Minister of Education created a committee to study the impact of integration on the education of students with learning disabilities as well as of those with special gifts and talents. By 1982, the committee had become a study committee on giftedness and presented a report on the organizational and pedagogical difficulty of guaranteeing services to gifted and talented children in schools (Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, 1982). Professor Francois Gagné, a member of the study committee, presents with "prudent optimism" developments in the education of gifted children in Quebec (Gagné, 1984). He describes as "very positive" a policy of the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation advocating the right of gifted and talented children to education according to their needs. The assistant deputy minister

responsible for education from kindergarten to high school presented the core of a Ministry policy on the education of gifted children during the First National [Quebec] Colloquium on giftedness (Rousseau, 1984). Two publications by the Ministry of Education later clarified the policy (Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, 1985a, 1985b).

The Ministry policy is based on the pursuit of excellence for all, and on the need to adapt provisions for the specific needs of gifted and talented students (Roberge, 1986). On the one hand, Quebec education should aim to stimulate optimal development of all capacities of each child and thus assist all to pursue excellence; on the other hand, it should recognize the principle that all persons are equal but different.

The Ministry policy comprises eight specific orientations or policy statements:

1. Identification of gifted and talented students.
2. Enrichment.
3. Personalized teaching methods.
4. Provision of varied educational means.
5. Encouraging gifted children to take maximum advantage of regular schooling.
6. Focus on the actions of the school team ("l'équipe-école").
7. Acknowledgment of excellent performance.
8. Participation of parents and community.

Only the first statement considers the specific needs of gifted and talented students and an education adapted to those needs; the others deal with either resources or procedures.

Statements 2, 3 and 4 specify enrichment resources, personalized teaching methods, and various other means of educating gifted learners. The advocacy group Giftedness Quebec (1985) found these policies gave direction but offered few specifics of funding formulae, timelines, and personnel to give leadership.

The other statements stress the importance of participation by and acknowledgment of the gifted. Giftedness Quebec found deplorable the want of specific educational services at the school level.

The preamble to the *Loi sur l'instruction publique* (1978) declares that all children have a right to education that fully develops the personality. This suggests the *Education Act* protects the education of gifted children. But there are in the law no specific references to gifted and talented students' right to appropriate education. In the absence of statutes, Giftedness Quebec qualifies the Ministry-level policy of 1985 as "a big step for the Ministry of Education but a small step for the gifted and talented" (p. 4).

Alberta

In 1982 January, the Minister of Education established a Task Force on Gifted and Talented Pupils and commissioned it to study the education of gifted and talented children in Alberta. Members of the Task Force represented various interest groups. In 1983, the Task Force presented a report (Alberta Department of Education, 1983) with 32 specific recommendations under the following heads: definition, incidence, identification, special programs, guidelines for service delivery, curriculum revision, consultation service, information service, inservice education and training of teachers, involvement of non-school persons and agencies, research and evaluation, provision of grants, mandatory legislative revisions, provincial coordination, central clearinghouse service, and regional resource centres.

In 1984 Yewchuk described the situation of gifted and talented students in Alberta as promising. According to the Director of Special Educational Services at the Alberta Ministry of Education, the 1984 revision of the system of special education finance favored appropriate programs for gifted and talented pupils at school-district level. Two million dollars was put into the education of gifted and talented children under special education provisions. Indeed, the Ministry of Education has acted on many of the recommendations of the Task Force report. The revised edition of the *Program Policy Manual* (Alberta Department of Education, 1985) explicitly discusses gifted and talented students. Exceptional children are defined as any students educationally disabled, gifted or talented. A gifted and talented student is "one who by virtue of outstanding ability is capable of exceptional performance, and who therefore requires special programs beyond the regular school program to realize his/her contribution to self and society" (p. 30).

The Ministry is developing identification methods, financing research projects, offering grants for training teachers, and suggesting ways to involve the community in the education of gifted children. A manual of program options for the education of gifted and talented pupils is being prepared by the Ministry of Education. Local schools are responsible for the identification, assessment, programming, placement, and evaluation of exceptional students (as defined earlier). Two to five percent of the Special Education Grant is spent on programs for the gifted and talented (Alberta Department of Education, 1985, p. 29).

The Alberta Teachers' Association has a division on the education of gifted and talented learners.

British Columbia

Already in 1980, Professor David Bain from the University of British Colum-

bia estimated that more than 80% of British Columbia's schools participate in enrichment projects. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation has more than 600 teachers in a specific interest division on education of gifted and talented children. The province also has an active TAG (The Association for Gifted) Division of the Council for Exceptional Children.

In the Spring of 1980, the Minister of Education presented a policy statement intending to serve two purposes:

1. to ensure provisions of educational opportunities appropriate to the needs and abilities of a significant number of students through "enrichment" and/or "gifted" education.
2. to provide the financial resources to encourage the implementation of appropriate provision in every school district.

Thus began a Ministry resource book for the education of gifted children (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1981). The guide offers not only pedagogical suggestion, but identification procedures, district planning for optional programs, curriculum models, teaching strategies, support services, program evaluation criteria, and an annotated selection of screening and evaluation instruments now in use in British Columbia.

In its most recent manual of policies, procedures and guidelines, the Special Programs Branch deals specifically with "The education of gifted children" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1985, 59–62). Its discussion of funding recognizes the administrative problems attaching to education for the gifted, argues the importance of early and ongoing identification, and recommends use of multiple criteria and instruments. The policy recognizes that basic enrichment can be provided by the regular classroom teacher within a flexible curriculum/classroom structure. It also pleads for specially trained teachers for enrichment centres, specialized courses, school- or district-based facilities, and special classes.

Ministry policies not embedded in provincial legislation are open to attack in periods of financial restraint (Leslie & Goguen, 1984). This should temper our optimistic picture of education for the gifted child in British Columbia.

Northwest Territories

In the Territorial Department of Education, a recent *Departmental Directive and Guidelines for Special Needs Education* (Northwest Territories Education, 1986) includes students with special gifts and talents in its description of students with special needs (p. 6). It bases its programs of intervention on an "ongoing, written, comprehensive, educational program implemented in the least restrictive environment based on the strengths and needs of each

student" (p. 7). The content of the Individual Education Program (I.E.P.) and the composition of the I.E.P. team are described, as are parental involvement, staffing and funding formulae, and staff training policy.

To link the six provinces and territories that have Ministerial policies does not imply that the level of policy development on the education of gifted children is the same in each of these jurisdictions. Three provinces—Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia—have detailed policies on resources (including financial) and procedures. Alberta and British Columbia are most specific in their mandate to school districts to provide appropriate education for gifted and talented children.

PROVINCES WITH LEGISLATION ON THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Ontario and Saskatchewan have consolidated their policies in educational legislation and pursuant regulation.

Ontario

Smyth (1984), in a review of the education of the ablest in Ontario, relates that in administrative policy the first definition of giftedness occurs in 1914. In 1917, advancement included auxiliary classes for above-average students under the *Auxiliary Classes Act* (cited by Smyth, 1984, p. 145).

In 1978, a Ministry publication outlined identification procedures, student characteristics, program suggestions, and teaching strategies (Ontario Department of Education, 1978).

Since 1980, the *Ontario Education Act* (1980) has made school boards responsible to provide appropriate education for all students. In the *Act*, an exceptional pupil is defined as "a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he is considered to need placement in a special education program" (*Ontario Education Act*, 1980, s. 1, (1) (21)). Gifted children are considered to be intellectually exceptional, to have a right to special programs and special services, and to possess:

an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1984, p. 17)

Ontario law requires that school boards provide programs and services to gifted learners. However, the definition of a gifted learner is restrictive, specifying intellectual exceptionality rather than (as in 1978) aesthetic,

kinesthetic and psycho-social talents as well as intellectual exceptionalities. Smyth (1984) argues that a broad-based identification system not limited to IQ could include all gifted. Nomination may come from various persons and refer to such criteria as creativity or task-commitment. The Ontario Ministry of Education (1985) later stated that aesthetic talents, kinesthetic talents, and psycho-social talents are not aspects of exceptionality (p. 6).

The *Special Education Information Handbook 1984* presents the spectrum of Ministry-level policies on special programs and special services to the exceptional pupil, including the gifted learner.

The *Ontario Education Act* (1980) is not limited to a general proclamation of the right to an appropriate education for all pupils but specifically defines "exceptional students," special programs, special services, and describes appropriate levels of resources.

Special education program means, in respect of an exceptional pupil, an educational program that is based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation and that includes a plan containing specific objectives and an outline of educational services that meets the needs of the exceptional pupil.

Special education services means facilities and resources, including support personnel and equipment, necessary for developing and implementing a special education program. (*Ontario Education Act*, 1980, s. 1, (1),(1))

The 1984 *Handbook* describes both policies for areas of low-incidence handicaps and policies on teacher education. Incoming teachers shall have courses on the characteristics and needs of exceptional pupils and on the theory and practice of individualized instruction. Policies on identification, placement, re/evaluation, and parents' rights to information and appeal are presented.

A second Ontario Ministry of Education (1985) document offers guidance on planning special educational programs for gifted learners, with a framework for affective and cognitive development.

As of 1986, Ontario was the only province or territory in Canada to have mandated a form of education (including special education programs and special education services) appropriate to gifted learners.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan had one of North America's earliest programs for gifted learners, developed in 1932 by Doctor Samuel Laycock at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. However, legal recognition of gifted children's special programs waited until 1978. In a revision of the *Saskatchewan Education Act*, school boards were allowed to offer special programs to gifted and talented learners:

Where the ordinary programs of instruction of the school are considered by the board of education to be insufficient to meet the educational needs of certain pupils of superior natural ability or exceptional talent, the board may make provision for such special programs as it considers feasible and appropriate. (*Saskatchewan Education Act*, 1978, s. 185)

Section 185 of the *Act* does not require but allows that boards provide education according to need to pupils of superior natural ability or exceptional talent. In August 1981, Saskatchewan's Department of Education issued a policy statement on the education of gifted students which further defined giftedness as a characteristic of students who have demonstrated high performance or who show potential in at least one of the following areas: specific academic aptitude, reasoning and divergent thinking, visual or performing arts, psychomotor ability. Hengen (1984) described the events of 1981 as improvement by provision of resources, especially bursaries and consultative services.

In 1984, the Ministry's Advisory Committee recommended the development of a plan for province-wide implementation of services for gifted learners, to ensure that resources both support implementation and respond to expectations (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1984, pp. 13, 14).

Consultative services to enhance local initiative were offered by a entire team of provincial consultants (1984–1985) (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1984, p. 6). Through the "Leadership and Training Project in Gifted Learner Education," launched by a special grant in 1985, the Department of Education provided consultative assistance on a continuous call-back basis. In March 1986 the Department mandated a team of thirteen "experts" to assist the provincial consultant.

To follow up the Minister's Advisory Committee report, the Department of Education established a Reference Group on gifted learner education. The Reference Group includes parents, educational administrators, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, educational consultants, the Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association, the Council for Exceptional Children, and the universities of Regina and Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan's 1985 budget allocated ten million new dollars for education and proposed 40 million more in each year for the next four. Gifted learner programs is one of five items in the financial plan. In the 1985 Education Development Fund, almost one million dollars (about 10% of the allotment) was spent on gifted-learner programs. According to the Provincial Consultant for Gifted Learners, 52 school divisions (45%) offered special programs to gifted learners during the year 1985–1986.

As has been shown, the provinces of Ontario and Saskatchewan both have, in addition to legislation on the education of gifted children, specific Ministry

policies to guide school boards and to assure delivery of prescribed services.

DISCUSSION

This paper describes the status of the education of gifted children in the law and in Ministerial policy of every province and territory. Four of the provinces and territories have no such policy. Eight provinces and territories have Ministerial policies on the education of gifted children. Of these, two (Ontario and Saskatchewan) also have specific legislative provision for the education of gifted children.

This study did not analyse how policy provisions are translated into appropriate practice. However, in provinces and territories with no official policy on the issue, no one has major responsibility for the education of gifted learners. On the other hand, seven of the eight provinces or territories with Ministerial policies have a Ministry official responsible in the area. In addition to human resources, these provinces may offer special funds, various programs, materials, and procedures to help District staff and teachers provide appropriate education.

The coincidence that the two provinces with legislated policy already had this when the Canadian Teacher Federation published its report in 1980 (Borthwick et al., 1980) could lead one to believe there has been no recent policy development. On the contrary, in Saskatchewan major policy developments in the Ministry have allocated resources essential to teachers of the gifted. In Ontario, the education of the gifted has been transformed by legislation requiring all school boards to offer appropriate education to gifted students. Furthermore, Ministerial policies on the education of gifted children have been developed since 1980 in the other provinces and territories.

A sign of growing awareness of the need for education of gifted children is the publication of special issues of various journals, including the present one.

A question remains: will the provinces and territories, other than Ontario and Saskatchewan, recognize in legislation the specific educational needs of gifted and talented students? Legislative protection for gifted and talented learners might be embodied in a revised school act or as a consequence of judicial intervention. Either way, section 15 of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* could lead to appropriate education for all, including gifted and talented learners (Poirier & Goguen, 1986).

NOTE

¹ Part of this paper was presented at the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies Invitational Conference, St. Andrews, New Brunswick, 1986 September 26.

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Die kanadische Gesetzgebung und Richtlinien zur Erziehung begabter und talentierter Kinder laden zu Vergleichen ein. Laut Ministerialbeamten in einer ersten Gruppe von Zuständigkeitsbereichen (Neufundland, Prince-Edward-Insel, Manitoba, Yukon) gibt es keine besondere Gesetzgebung oder Richtlinien im Hinblick auf die Begabtenbildung. In einer zweiten Gruppe (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Alberta, Britisch-Kolumbien und den Northwest Territories) sind besondere ministerielle Richtlinien zur Erziehung von Begabten gegeben. In der dritten Gruppe (Saskatchewan und Ontario) liegen spezifische gesetzgebende Erklärungen zur Begabtenbildung vor.

Las leyes y política canadiense en la educación de niños excepcionales difiere según el estado federal así: los ministros oficiales en los estados federales de Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba y el Yukón anunciaron que no tienen leyes y estatutos en educación para niños excepcionales. Un segundo grupo de Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia y los territorios de Nor-oeste ofrecen políticas específicas en educación excepcional. El tercer grupo, Saskatchewan y Ontario tienen legislaciones específicas también.

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