

# Accelerating Gifted Students in Canada: Policies and Possibilities

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## Abstract

Policy documents related to gifted education and 18 forms of accelerated learning practices were collected from all Canadian provinces and territories. Where they were found, policies continue to be permissive and flexible. *Explicit* support for gifted education and acceleration was strongest in Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, provinces with categorical orientations to exceptional learners. Additional opportunities to advance learners also existed in these and all jurisdictions because *potentially* accelerative practices were supported, such as correspondence courses and mentoring. In order to address the needs of students who know more and learn more quickly than their peers, intentional, flexible interpretation, and implementation of permissive policies are becoming increasingly important as jurisdictions' philosophies and documentation in special education become less categorical and more inclusive.

*Keywords:* gifted, acceleration, policy, pacing, compacting, early entrance, grade skipping, advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment, telescoping.

## Précis

Des documents de politique concernant l'éducation des élèves doués et 18 formulaires relatifs à des programmes d'apprentissage accéléré ont été recueillis dans toutes les provinces et territoires canadiens. On a examiné le contenu de 69 documents afin de déterminer la nature et l'étendue du soutien aux services aux étudiants doués en général, ainsi qu'à l'apprentissage accéléré. Les résultats donnent un aperçu de la variabilité et la flexibilité de ces politiques dans les provinces et territoires canadiens. Des documents provenant de l'Alberta, de la Colombie-Britannique, du Nouveau-Brunswick et de la Nouvelle-Écosse ont démontré que ces provinces offrent le plus grand soutien catégorique aux apprenants avancés. Les formulaires de programmes d'apprentissage accéléré en fonction du contenu (p. ex., l'obtention de crédits à la suite d'un examen ou de l'enseignement accéléré d'un sujet) étaient plus souvent favorisés que ceux axés sur l'année scolaire (p. ex., le saut de classe et l'entrée précoce à la maternelle).

Two of the most frequently cited characteristics of students identified as gifted are the speed of their learning and the precocious development of their abilities. These strengths create challenges for a system of education that relies heavily on chronological age to organize students and services. The many forms of educational acceleration can bring flexibility into the curriculum and can assist with placing students who are ready for more advanced content at a faster pace than their age mates in an appropriate learning environment. Acceleration is consistently identified as an essential feature of education for these highly able students (e.g., Gagné, 2007; Rogers, 2007; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007), since it has a stronger body of research evidence supporting its effectiveness than any other intervention in gifted education (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2004). As a result, it is considered a “cornerstone of exemplary gifted education practices” (NAGC, 2004, p. 1).

After surveying all Canadian school districts, Kanevsky (2011a) reported enormous variability in the forms of acceleration permitted and practised across Canada. Her results provided insights into accelerative options at the district level, but no current information could be found regarding provincial or territorial policies surrounding them. Significant reforms to national, provincial, and territorial policies have impacted education since the results of the last survey of policies were reported by Goguen (1993). For example, inclusive educational policies and practices are now institutionalized in many jurisdictions that had been planning to implement them in the early 1990s. We expected they would be reflected in the policies influencing the education of gifted students today. The purpose of this investigation was to provide a better understanding of the location, nature, and extent of existing policies related to gifted education, and particularly acceleration, in Canadian jurisdictions.

## **Canadian Context**

The patriation of the 1982 Constitution Act of Canada, of which part 1 is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, guarantees every Canadian the fundamental rights and freedoms “justified in a free and democratic society” (Constitution Act, 1982). In education, the act “fostered the development of policies to assure appropriate education to all children and prompted provincial and territorial jurisdictions to revise educational laws and

regulations” (Goguen, 1993, p. 771). Many of the policies of the 1980s have since undergone revisions in response to more inclusive philosophies of education, reflecting shifts in perceptions of where and how “appropriate education to all” should take place.

Policies are “designed to steer the actions and behaviour of people, to guide institutions and professionals in a certain direction” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 8), and education policies “seek to frame, constitute and change educational practices” (Lingard & Ozga, 2007, p. 2). At the provincial or territorial level, explicit policies are found in texts generated by ministries and departments of education. Implicit policies are evident in “words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended” (Ball, 1994, p. 10). Thus the nature and extent of provisions for students identified as gifted are determined by policies, some explicit and some implicit.

Many advocates feel explicit government policies can stabilize support for services and inform local policies and practices (e.g., VanTassel-Baska, 2009). Mandates increase the likelihood of systemic change and “legitimize the perception of the need for gifted services” (Brown, Avery, VanTassel-Baska, Worley, & Stambaugh, 2006, p. 12). Policies that specify the nature and extent of resources and services for students identified as gifted have been considered a fundamental first step toward institutionalizing programming for gifted students in all schools, regardless of their location (urban or rural) or the socio-economic status of the community (Plucker, 2004).

The language used in explicit government policies can either *mandate* or *permit* action. For example, policies using “must” indicate that decision-makers are mandated, or required, to act as specified. In contrast, those that use permissive language, such as the word “may,” permit, but do not require, decision-makers to act in a particular way.

The most recent Canadian national survey of policies in gifted education was undertaken 20 years ago (Goguen, 1993), and the education of exceptional students has changed substantially since that time. That report provided a brief snapshot of existing policies. Our investigation updates and extends this work by more closely examining policies related to the many forms of academic acceleration in each province and territory.

## **Educational Acceleration**

Flexible pacing options are essential to accommodate individual differences in students’ rates of learning and development. The goal of all forms of flexible pacing is to provide

students with continuous opportunities to enhance their competence at a rate and level responsive to individual readiness. The term “acceleration” is used to refer to a variety of practices that increase the rate or level of learning for students who learn more quickly or have more advanced levels of understanding than those expected for students in their grade. Along with enriched curriculum, and social and emotional supports, access to the various forms of acceleration is an essential feature of systems of education involving academically talented students (e.g., NAGC, 2011; Stanley, 2000; Van Tassel-Baska & Brown, 2007) as their achievement “falls dramatically when they are required to do routine work at a routine pace” (Kulik, 1992, p. 7). Without opportunities to increase the pace or level of learning, many students assigned to classes based on chronological age often become bored and frustrated (Hollingworth, 1942; Newland, 1976; Terman, 1925), sometimes tuning out and turning off, sometimes misbehaving. What were once eager learners become disenchanted, uncurious, often angry or withdrawn, seat-fillers. The child who finishes early the assignment he or she could have done several years ago, who finds the teacher’s careful presentations obvious and elementary, is forced to waste precious time and to find some means to adapt to the classroom scene. Such adaptations are not likely to be positive ones (Robinson & Robinson, 1982, p. 84).

All forms of acceleration allow students to progress “more rapidly, based on readiness and motivation” (NAGC, 2004, p.1). They are competency-based alternatives to age-based programming. They involve much more than grade skipping, including diverse practices ranging from curriculum compacting and Advanced Placement (AP) courses to combined classes and more. Table 1 is based on the 18 forms of acceleration described by the National Work Group on Acceleration (2009) and Southern and Jones (2004). The nine that “provide students with advanced content, skills and understandings before the expected age or grade level” are considered content based (Colangelo, et al., 2010, p. 184), such as “credit by examination” (course challenge or testing out). The nine that reduce the number of years students are in the K–12 system (Rogers, 2004) and involve moving students into settings with older students are considered grade based, such as grade skipping.

**Table 1:** Forms of Acceleration<sup>1</sup>

<b>Content Based</b>
<p><b>Advanced Placement (AP):</b> The student takes a course (traditionally in high school) that results in postsecondary credit upon completion of a standardized AP examination with a score acceptable to the college or university.</p>
<p><b>Concurrent or Dual Enrolment:</b> The student is enrolled in one level but takes a course or courses at a higher level. Examples include taking calculus at the university level and receiving university credit for it upon successful completion while still enrolled in high school, or taking a high school course in chemistry while still enrolled in junior high school.</p>
<p><b>Correspondence Courses:</b> A student enrolls in advanced coursework outside of normal school instruction. Instruction may be delivered by mail, internet, television and/or other media.</p>
<p><b>Credit by Examination:</b> The student is awarded advanced standing (e.g., high school or college) by successfully completing some form of mastery test or activity. This is also known as “course challenge” or “testing out.”</p>
<p><b>Curriculum Compacting:</b> Based on high levels of mastery demonstrated on a pre-assessment, the amounts of introductory activities, drill, and practice are reduced for one or more students in a class. The time gained may be used for more advanced content instruction or to participate in enrichment activities. Curriculum compacting does not necessarily result in advanced grade placement.</p>
<p><b>Extracurricular Programs:</b> A student enrolls in coursework after school, on weekends, or in summer programs that offer advanced instruction and/or credit.</p>
<p><b>International Baccalaureate Programs:</b> Students complete advanced interdisciplinary curriculum prescribed by the International Baccalaureate organization. At the end of high school, students take an international examination and may receive advanced standing in their postsecondary studies.</p>
<p><b>Mentoring:</b> A student is paired with a mentor or expert tutor who provides advanced or more rapidly paced instruction.</p>
<p><b>Subject Matter, Single Subject, or Partial Acceleration:</b> A student is placed in classes with older peers for a part of the day <i>or</i> works with materials from higher grade placements in one or more content areas. Subject-matter acceleration may also take place outside of the general instructional schedule (e.g., summer school or after school) or by using higher level instructional activities on a continuous progress basis without leaving the placement with chronological-age peers.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Based on Southern & Jones (2004) and reprinted from Kanevsky, L. (2011a). A survey of educational acceleration practices in Canada, *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34(3), 153–180.

**Grade Based**

**Combined classes:** Students in two or more consecutive grades are enrolled in one class (e.g., a fourth- and fifth-grade combined class). This is a form of acceleration when it is done intentionally to allow younger students to interact academically and socially with older peers. It may or may not result in an advanced grade placement later.

**Continuous progress:** A student is given content progressively as prior content is mastered. The practice is accelerative when the student's progress exceeds the performance of chronological peers in rate and level.

**Early entrance to Grade 1:** Students either skip kindergarten or accelerate from kindergarten into Grade 1 during what would be the student's first year of school.

**Early admission to kindergarten:** Students enter kindergarten prior to achieving the minimum age for school entry as set by the provincial ministry of education.

**Early entrance to middle school, high school, or college:** A student is advanced to the next level of a subject or schooling at least one year ahead of chronological-age peers at the end of elementary, middle, junior, or senior secondary school. This may involve dual enrolment and/or credit by examination.

**Early graduation from high school:** A student graduates from a 4-year high school program in 3½ years or less. Generally, this is accomplished by increasing the amount of coursework taken each year in high school, but it may also be accomplished through concurrent or dual enrolment in college or university, or through extracurricular or correspondence coursework.

**Grade skipping:** A student is considered to have skipped one or more grades if he or she is given a grade-level placement ahead of chronological-age peers at anytime during the year.

**Self-paced instruction:** The student has control over pacing decisions. Self-paced instruction is a subtype of continuous progress.

**Telescoped curriculum:** A student is provided instruction in less time than is normal (e.g., completing a one-year course in one semester, or three years of middle school in two). Telescoping differs from curriculum compacting in two ways: it is planned to fit a precise time schedule and it always results in advanced grade placement.

Acceleration of any kind is often a contentious option for advanced learners due to concerns for students' well-being (Heinbokel, 2002); however, nearly 100 years of research examining the effects of all types of educational acceleration on academic, social, and emotional development has provided consistent evidence of its benefits when it is based on comprehensive assessment and planning (e.g., Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004a,

2004b; Kulik & Kulik, 1984a, 1984b; Rogers, 1991). Robinson (2004) concluded her review of the research on the social and emotional development of accelerants stating, “None of the options has been shown to do psychosocial damage to gifted students as a group; when effects are noted, they are usually (but not invariably) in a positive direction” (p. 64). Rigorous meta-analyses undertaken by Kulik and Kulik (1984a; 1984b) and Rogers (1991) concluded that achievement test scores of students who were carefully selected for acceleration were 0.8 standard deviations higher than those of students of equivalent ability who were not accelerated. This finding represents an increase of an additional year of academic growth on a grade-equivalent scale (Wells, Lohman & Marron, 2009). In addition, students identified as gifted rated flexible pacing as one of the most desirable forms of curriculum differentiation (Kanevsky, 2011b).

### **Controversies Surrounding Academic Acceleration**

The belief that students should be educated with others of the same age was not prevalent until the mid- to late-19th century (Kett, 1974), and “only gradually approached uniformity in the early part of the 20th century” (Pressey, 1949; as cited in Southern & Jones, 1991, p. 6). Concerns began to arise shortly after these initiatives were implemented. For example, in 1920 T. S. Henry suggested,

Instead of holding to a rigid scheme of gradation, adjusted to the theoretical “average child,” to which all children must be made to conform, those who are in charge of public school systems are coming to see the advisability of making a more flexible arrangement and a more careful adjustment to the varying aptitudes and capacities of the members of the school population. (p. 7)

Such proposals were countered by assertions that doing so would endanger students’ social and emotional well-being (Daurio, 1979). The controversy became more vigorous in the 1990s, when the U.S. National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994/2005) bluntly stated, “grouping children by age should become a thing of the past” (p. 31).

In most Canadian schools, chronological age is the primary criterion for the assignment of students to classes. Inclusive educational philosophies translate into classrooms filled with diverse students of the same age who vary greatly in learning potential



and competence as well as many other characteristics. For students identified as gifted, age-based education in mixed-ability classes is often problematic. Although they may already know age/grade level content or be ready to move through it at a faster pace, their need for and right to developmentally appropriate academic challenge is often lost among the needs of age peers who struggle to achieve grade-level expectations.

The gradual simplification (“dumbing down”) of North American textbook content exacerbated the situation by progressively reducing the difficulty of curriculum over time (Benbow & Stanley, 1996, p. 260). Even AP courses (content and exams) have been diluted to accommodate “increased diversity in the academic readiness of the AP population” (Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2004, p. 222). Those researchers and others (e.g., Reis & Westberg, 1994) argued that as the level of challenge in age-graded material decreased, the need to provide high-ability students with opportunities to learn at a pace faster than their peers increased.

### **Canadian Legislation and Policy on Gifted Education and Acceleration**

Literature related to policy on gifted education and acceleration in Canada is sparse. The little we could find was based on poorly described surveys dating back to 1978. In that year and the next, the Canadian Education Association (CEA) undertook a survey of provincial legislation and policies (Borthwick, Dow, Levesque, & Banks, 1980). The Yukon and Northwest Territories were not included. The authors found only Saskatchewan and Ontario had legislation supporting the provision of services for gifted students, and it was *permissive*, allowing for district- and school-level decision making, but not requiring it. None of the provinces *mandated* (required) identification or special provisions for gifted students. Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island had permissive policies (not legislation) that allowed school districts to recognize and address the needs of gifted students. Neither New Brunswick nor Newfoundland had policies or legislation. Quebec’s response to the CEA survey was the only one to explicitly support acceleration. It identified sections of Regulation 7 that addressed continuous progress, early advancement to secondary school, and single-subject acceleration (Borthwick et al., 1980, p. 40). Based on the inconsistencies they found among the provincial policies, the authors simply concluded, “Every province has its own approach” (p. 37) to addressing the needs of gifted students.

Ten years later, when summarizing the outcome of his investigation of legislation and policy in each province and territory, Goguen (1989) reported,

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, Québec, Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories) offers specific Ministerial policies on gifted education. The third group, Saskatchewan and Ontario, have specific legislative statements on gifted education. (p. 18)

Ontario was the only province that “mandated” its “school boards provide programs and services” (p. 25) to gifted students in its education act (1980, as cited in Goguen, 1993). Saskatchewan also mentioned gifted education in section 185 of its 1978 education act; however, the language was not as strong. It “allowed” a board to “make provision for such special programs as it considers feasible and appropriate” (Goguen, 1989, p. 26). Along with Alberta and British Columbia, Quebec had detailed policy concerning gifted students but not legislation. In the years that passed between the CEA survey in 1978 and Goguen’s in 1989, New Brunswick’s Secteur des Services Francophones d’Éducation and Anglophone Educational Services Division had both developed written policies. Gifted students were still mentioned minimally in Nova Scotia’s policy, and the Northwest Territories included gifted students in its special education guidelines. Manitoba and Prince Edward Island no longer had policies, nor did Newfoundland or the Yukon.

In 1993, Goguen reported Alberta, as well as Ontario and Saskatchewan, had legislation and policy. He considered British Columbia’s and Manitoba’s departmental policies to be “moderately” comprehensive because they provided a definition of giftedness and described suitable program options. The policies of Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the Northwest Territories were deemed “minimal” because they were brief and/or vague. Finally, PEI and the Yukon had “no legislative nor departmental policies related to gifted” (p. 774).

Other than the brief references to a few forms of acceleration in the policy surveys mentioned above, little has been written about Canadian jurisdictions’ policies related to any form of this practice. Early entrance to kindergarten was the focus of the only two articles that could be found. Gagné and Gagnier, (2003) described Quebec’s policy, and McCluskey, Massey, and Baker (1997) provided a description of the early entrance

program established in the Lord Selkirk School Division in Selkirk, Manitoba, since 1971. Both appeared in studies following students who began their schooling prior to the standard age of admission and indicated this practice was a healthy option for many, but not all, precocious youngsters.

In summary, where it has existed, Canadian policy in gifted education, has been permissive, enabling decision-makers at the school district or school level to determine who, how, and when special programming, including accelerative options, are offered (Borthwick, et al., 1980; Goguen, 1989, 1993). Ontario was the only province to have mandated services to students identified as gifted. Overall, little research has addressed Canadian policies on gifted education, and there was minimal mention of acceleration in the studies that were undertaken. Unfortunately the sampling and survey procedures used in previous investigations have been varied and poorly described, so it is difficult to specify the exact nature and extent of changes in those policies over time.

We felt any policies found that were related to acceleration practices should be situated in the context of each jurisdiction's policy on gifted education, for two reasons. First, we suspected acceleration practices would have greater support in jurisdictions with explicit policy on gifted education; however, this question had never been addressed in the literature. Second, the existing literature on gifted education policies in Canada was almost 20 years old and needed to be updated. In the 30 years since the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted, reforms reflecting inclusive educational policies have been continuous. In light of these forces, a review of government documentation was needed in order to understand gifted education policies and students' access to accelerative options in Canada, and to provide a baseline from which to track policy trends in the future.

We addressed the following research questions in our analyses:

1. What is the nature and extent of provincial and territorial policy documents focused on the education of gifted students?
2. Which forms of acceleration were supported by each province and territory in Canada?
3. Is there a relationship between the number of forms of acceleration supported by a province or territory and the existence of a policy related to the education of students who are gifted?
4. Is there a relationship between provincial or territorial enrolment and the existence of policy supporting each form of acceleration?

## Methods

### Jurisdictions

Every Canadian territory ( $n = 3$ ) and province ( $n = 10$ ) was included in our search for English-language policy documents.

### Collection of Policy Documents

Five rounds of document collection were undertaken between December 2008 and February 2011 to ensure we had a comprehensive sample of relevant data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). We sought three types of government documents available in print or online: (a) policies addressing the education of gifted and talented students or any of the 18 forms of acceleration, (b) resource materials created for teachers and practitioners who work with gifted students, (c) regulations governing services and programs for K–12 education, such as those found in a province's or territory's school act. We treated resource materials as policy documents because each of these texts was considered a "vehicle for carrying and transmitting a policy message" (Ozga, 2000, p. 33).

#### *Round 1*

Each provincial and territorial ministry or departmental website was searched for policy and materials that addressed the education of gifted students and acceleration.

#### *Round 2*

Each province or territory's ministry or department of education was contacted by phone. The individual identified as most able to direct us to government documents that addressed acceleration was asked to help us locate those materials.

#### *Round 3*

A review of the documents collected in the second round indicated a need to refine and repeat our requests. For example, after examining the results of Round 2, we suspected some ministry contacts might have equated "acceleration" with grade skipping. As a result, we contacted them again and offered each the definitions in Table 1 to ensure all contacts shared a common understanding of all 18 forms of acceleration. Seven officials asked to

have the definitions sent to them. In total, eight out of 13 jurisdictional contacts responded by email alone, two by phone and email, and three did not respond.

#### ***Round 4***

This round was inspired by two contacts who suggested that we include each jurisdiction's school act and special education policy. We did this to standardize our collection of documents across jurisdictions.

#### ***Round 5***

None of the previous rounds had produced any documents relating to "split" or "combined" classes, yet we knew this form of classroom structure was prevalent. Therefore, a final Google search was conducted for these search terms, using the limitation "in Canada only."

### **Analysis of the Gifted Education Policy Documents**

To address the first research question, the content of the eight documents focused solely on the education of gifted students was examined. We looked for evidence of eight topics used by the NAGC (2011) in the *State of the Nation* report to evaluate gifted education policies: administrative structure for personnel serving gifted and talented students, funding, a mandate to identify and serve gifted and talented students, accountability (a plan for monitoring or auditing programs regularly), a definition of giftedness, procedures for the identification of gifted students, a description of programs and services for gifted students, and staffing and personnel preparation. Frequencies of each topic were counted (Borg & Gall, 1989) to develop Canadian baseline data on topics considered essential to a comprehensive policy to guide the education of students identified as gifted (NAGC, 2011).

### **Acceleration Searches and Analyses**

#### ***Text Search***

All but one of the 70 documents collected were available online or as pdf files. The text of each was searched for all of the 31 search terms to locate evidence to address the second research question. For example, for early entrance to kindergarten, Grade 1, middle school,

or high school, a search was conducted using the term “early” in all documents. If the text matching a research term represented a form of acceleration appearing in Table 1, the text was copied into a spreadsheet (matrix) created for each province or territory (document X type of acceleration). Portions of Alberta Learning’s *Programming for Students with Special Needs, Chapter 7: Teaching Students Who Are Gifted and Talented* (2000) were searched manually by reading the print copy because they could not be found in digital formats.

### ***Coding and Analysis***

The manifest and latent content of the quotes found in all policy documents collected was considered when interpreting their intent (Berg, 1989; Franzosi, 2004). As stated by Berg, (1989), “manifest content is comparable to the ‘surface structure’ present in the message, and latent content is the ‘deep structural’ meaning conveyed by the message” (p. 107). Each quote was categorized in two ways: by type of acceleration and as content or grade based (according to Colangelo et al., 2010). A coding system was also developed to interpret latent content according to the degree of support it provided for acceleration. Four codes were used for categorizing the content of the quotes:

- **Explicit support:** The quote endorsed a form of acceleration as a means of providing advanced learners with content beyond grade level and/or at a more rapid pace. It usually, but not always, resulted in advanced standing in the subject or grade. If it appeared in a document focused on gifted students, it was coded “explicit.”
- **Potential support:** A passage was coded as potentially accelerative if the practice was encouraged in a document addressing the education of all students or those with special needs, or if the expectation of work beyond grade level was not specified. For example, correspondence courses *could* be accelerative *if* a student was enrolled in a course beyond her or his current grade level.
- **No support:** Although the quote included one of the search terms, it did not represent an accelerative practice.
- **Prohibited:** The quote indicated an accelerative practice was not permitted in that jurisdiction.

The authors independently rated each quote for the degree of support for acceleration. Our ratings were identical for 175 out of 184 of the quotes, producing an inter-rater reliability of 95.1%. Consensus was then negotiated for the remaining nine quotes. This

procedure is consistent with those recommended by Stemler (2004) for establishing inter-rater reliability by calculating the percent agreement for “nominal variables whose levels on the rating scale represent qualitatively different categories” (para. 13).

### **Additional Data Analyses**

The third and fourth research questions were each investigated using correlations to determine the strength and direction of relationships between the number of forms of acceleration explicitly supported by each jurisdiction and two variables: (1) whether or not the jurisdiction had a policy document dedicated to gifted education, and (2) the jurisdiction’s full-time enrollment (FTE).

## **Results**

Of the 70 policy documents located by the search process (see Appendix A), eight focused solely on the education of gifted students while 62 were more broadly focused on general education and the education of students with special needs.

### **Policy Related to Gifted Education**

Saskatchewan was the only province with legislation that mentioned gifted students. The Saskatchewan Education Act (1995) states,

Where the ordinary programs of instruction of the school are considered by the board of education or the conseil scolaire to be insufficient to meet the educational needs of certain pupils of superior natural ability or exceptional talent, the board of education or the conseil scolaire may make provision for any special programs that it considers feasible and appropriate. (c.E-0.2, s.187)

The permissive tone in this quote is characteristic of most of the language related to the education of students identified as gifted in Canada.

Five provinces (and no territories) had one or more documents focused solely on the education of gifted students (see Table 2). Four of the eight documents were from Alberta and one each from British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and New-

foundland and Labrador. Three of Alberta's documents were resource guides for teachers of gifted and talented students, and the fourth was written for parents.

**Table 2:** Canadian Gifted Education Policy Documents

Province	Title	No. of Pages
British Columbia	Gifted Education: A Resource Guide for Teachers	38
Alberta	Developing New Solutions: Individualized Program Planning (IPP): ECS to Grade 12, Chapter 11: Planning for Students Who Are Gifted	56
Alberta	Programming for Students With Special Needs, Chapter 7: Teaching Students Who Are Gifted and Talented	347
Alberta	The Journey: A Handbook for Parents of Children Who Are Gifted and Talented	118
Alberta	Ukrainian Language and Culture 9Y Guide to Implementation (4–6), Chapter 5: Students Who Are Gifted	16
New Brunswick	Gifted and Talented Students: A Resource Guide for Teachers	66
Nova Scotia	Gifted Education and Talent Development	218
Newfoundland and Labrador	Gifted and Talented (webpage)	2

As can be seen in Table 2, the extent of these policy documents varied greatly. They ranged from one short webpage (equivalent to two printed pages) on the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education website (n.d. b) to a comprehensive 347-page resource binder for teachers of gifted students in Alberta (Alberta Learning, 2000).

The content of these materials also differed across jurisdictions (see Table 3). Two topics derived from the NAGC's *State of the Nation* report appeared in all of the documents: defining giftedness, and programs and services recommended for gifted students. Policies from four jurisdictions described procedures for identifying gifted students. Only two jurisdictions (Alberta and Nova Scotia) included information on administrative structures supporting gifted students, funding, and staff development; one, from Alberta



described accountability procedures. None of the provinces or territories specified a mandate to identify and serve gifted students.

**Table 3:** Topics Addressed in Five Provinces' Documents Related to Gifted Education

Topic	British Columbia	Alberta	New Brunswick	Nova Scotia	Newfoundland & Labrador	Percentage
Definition of giftedness	X	X	X	X	X	100%
Programs and services	X	X	X	X	X	100%
Identification procedures	X	X	X	X		80%
Staffing and personnel preparation		X		X		40%
Administrative structure		X		X		40%
Funding		X		X		40%
Accountability		X				20%
Mandate to identify and serve gifted students						0%
Total topics addressed	3	7	3	6	2	

Clearly, Alberta had the most extensive resources related to gifted students. Only Alberta's policy documents included as many as seven of the eight program evaluation topics proposed by NAGC (2011). Alberta was also the only province to provide a handbook for parents of gifted children. Others had no formal policies on a number of key topics. Some jurisdictions without a document addressing gifted education may have embedded their policies on these topics in documents addressing the needs of all exceptional students; however, we searched those documents only for terms related to acceleration, not the elements of policy in gifted education. For example, the Yukon's definition of "intellectual exceptionality" (advanced and delayed) was found in its *Special Program*

*Services: A Handbook of Procedures and Guidelines* (1995, p. D-19). Similarly, the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2001) mandate for programs and services as well as their definition of intellectual giftedness appears in *Special Education: A Guide for Educators*.

## **Policies Related to Educational Acceleration**

### ***Forms of Acceleration***

The second research question addressed the extent of policies supporting acceleration. All 18 forms of acceleration appeared as an explicit or potential form of acceleration in one or more of the documents located (see Table 4). The accelerative practices appear in rank order by frequency of explicit support. Credit by examination had the most; early entrance to Grade 1 had none. The policy materials directed school districts or divisions to permit, not require, each practice for gifted students.

### ***Content- vs. Grade-Based Acceleration***

As can be seen in Table 4, the most frequently supported forms of acceleration were almost entirely content based. Six of the top seven accelerative practices explicitly supported in policy were content related. The only grade-based form in the top seven was grade skipping, which ranked fourth. Six grade-based forms were supported by fewer than four jurisdictions (early graduation, combined classes, early entrance to kindergarten, self-paced instruction, and early entrance to middle or high school). As previously mentioned, early entrance to Grade 1 was not supported in any document.

### ***Explicit Support for Acceleration***

Of the 234 cells created by the intersection of the 18 types of acceleration and the 13 jurisdictions in Table 4, 32.5% indicate one or more documents from a jurisdiction provided explicit support for advanced learning opportunities. Examples of explicit quotes for each form of acceleration are provided in Table 5.

Only four of the 13 jurisdictions explicitly supported more than half of the forms of acceleration. Alberta led Canada with policy explicitly supporting 14 (78%) of the 18 accelerative options. It was followed closely by British Columbia with 13 (72%). Two of the Maritime provinces, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, were also strong, explicitly supporting 12 (67%) and 11 (61%) respectively. Beyond these four jurisdictions, there was a dramatic reduction in the frequency of explicit support. Manitoba supported six (33%) forms, and Ontario and Newfoundland explicitly supported four (22%). The remainder of the jurisdictions supported three (17%) or fewer, with Nunavut having no explicit policies that supported acceleration (Nunavut Education Act, 2008).

When viewing the results by form of acceleration rather than by jurisdiction, as mentioned above, credit by examination had the most extensive support, as it was clearly endorsed by nine (69%) of the 13 provinces and territories. Subject-matter acceleration was supported in documents from eight jurisdictions (62%). Curriculum compacting and dual enrolment appeared in seven (54%), followed by AP and International Baccalaureate courses, which were endorsed by six (46%). Grade skipping, continuous progress, and mentoring were recommended by five (38%), followed by telescoping in four (31%). Extracurricular programs, correspondence courses, and early graduation were found in documentation generated by three provinces (23%); combined or split classes were each supported explicitly in two (15%), and early admission to kindergarten, middle, or high school, and self-paced instruction were each found in one (8%) jurisdiction's documents.

### ***Potentially Accelerative Practices***

We also examined the policy documents for text that addressed a practice that *could* provide students with advanced learning opportunities *if* content beyond grade level was included in plans for these services. Twelve percent of the cells in Table 4 contain P's, indicating this finding. In most cases, provinces providing extensive explicit support for accelerative practices, like British Columbia and Alberta, were low on potential support. In some cases, the opposite was also true. For example, in the Yukon, which had

**Table 4:** Summary of Explicit (E) and Potential (P) Support for Each Type of Acceleration in Each Province and Territory

Type	Content or Grade Based	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NL	YK	NT	NU	Total Explicit	Total Potential
Credit by examination	Content	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E		E			9	0
Subject matter	Content	E	E	E		E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E		8	0
Curriculum compacting	Content	E	E	P	E	E	E	E	E	E	E				7	1
Dual enrolment	Content	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E		E			7	0
Advanced Placement	Content	E	E	E		E	E	E	E	E					6	0
International Baccalaureate	Content	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E					6	0
Grade skipping	Grade	E	E			E	E	E	E	E	E	P	P		5	2
Continuous progress	Grade	E	E	E	E	E	E	P				P			5	2
Mentoring	Content	E	E	P	P	P	E	E	E	E	E	P			5	4
Telescoping	Grade	E	E				E	E	E						4	0
Extracurricular programs	Content	E	E	P	P	P	P	E	E			P			3	4
Correspondence courses	Content	E	E	P	P	P	E	E	P			P	P	P	3	7
Early graduation	Grade	E	E				E	E				P			3	1
Combined classes	Grade			E	P	E	E		E						2	1
Early entrance to kindergarten	Grade			P	P	E									1	2

Table 4, continued . . .

Type	Content or Grade Based	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NL	YK	NT	NU	Total Explicit	Total Potential
Early entrance to middle or high school	Grade	P	P		E							P			1	2
Self-paced	Grade	E										P			1	1
Early entrance to Grade 1	Grade	P													0	1
Total explicit		13	14	3	6	4	2	12	11	3	4	3	1	0	76	28
Total potential		1	1	5	3	4	0	1	1	1	0	8	2	1	28	28

explicitly supported three, we found policy that provided potential support for eight more. There were, however, some provinces and territories, such as Nunavut, Quebec and the Northwest Territories where little potential or explicit support was found.

Three content-based forms of acceleration most often appeared to be potentially accelerative. The opportunity to take correspondence courses was the most frequently mentioned, in documents from seven jurisdictions (54%). This indicated any student who was ready could enroll in distance education or online coursework in order to access learning opportunities. However, gifted students could potentially do so in order to access courses beyond their grade level as well. Mentoring and extracurricular programs appeared in four jurisdictions' documents and could be treated in the same way. Grade skipping, continuous progress, and early admission to kindergarten, middle, or high school also appeared in documents from two jurisdictions (16%). Curriculum compacting, early graduation, combined classes, self-pacing, and early admission to Grade 1 were each found in materials from one (8%) jurisdiction. No potential support was found for the remaining six forms of acceleration.

**Table 5:** Examples of Language Providing Explicit Support for Each Form of Acceleration

<b>Content-Based Forms of Acceleration</b>	
<b>Form of Acceleration</b>	<b>Example</b>
Advanced Placement	Advanced Placement (AP): Students participate in senior high school courses that follow the prescribed AP program; and students who successfully complete examinations in the program may apply for advanced credit or placement at post-secondary institutions. (Alberta Education, 2006, p. 8)
Concurrent or Dual Enrollment	Examples of acceleration include . . . Dual enrolment (a student may take university courses while in high school, high school courses while in middle school, or middle school courses while in elementary). (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2007, p. 24)
Correspondence Courses	Examples of acceleration include . . . Advanced courses through distance education. (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2007, p. 24)
Credit by Examination	The intention is to allow students to challenge a course and to demonstrate the course requirements through a rigorous and comprehensive challenge process, in order to move on to further learning. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Learning, 2009, p. 19)
Curriculum Compacting	Assesses student's prior knowledge on a topic. Excuses him or her from mastered material. Plans for learning what is not known and frees up time for enrichment or accelerated study. (Alberta Learning, 2000, p. 130)
Extracurricular Programs	Extracurricular activities (outside school hours, accelerated options for students with an intense and focused interest include camps, institutes, and activities that provide opportunities for mastering challenging material/skills at a fast pace). (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2010, p. 116)

Form of Acceleration	Example
International Baccalaureate programs	The focus of the IB program is to expand students' thinking beyond provincial and national ideologies, while providing a strong foundation in the knowledge and skills of the subjects taught. In IB courses, students learn how and why, as well as what . . . Having taken the IB program courses, students are better prepared for the rigour of university-college life. (Alberta Learning, 2000, p. 185–186)
Mentoring	Mentoring . . . is particularly appropriate for gifted students who can meet curricular outcomes with substantial speed, and who often display a precocious interest in a career area. (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2007, p. 22)
Subject Matter	A student takes a subject at a higher level than his/her grade level. (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2007, p. 24)

### Grade-Based Forms of Acceleration

Form of Acceleration	Example
Combined classes	Multilevel classrooms allow for continuous progress and all learners are challenged. In a multilevel environment, students do not need to spend time on concepts and skills they have already mastered. (Manitoba Education, 2003 p. 1–7)
Continuous progress	The concept of continuous progress as a means of individualizing instruction was introduced in Saskatchewan in the 1960s. This policy accommodated individual needs by allowing children to progress through the curriculum at their own rates according to their individual abilities. (Saskatchewan Education, n.d., p. 4)
Early admission to kindergarten	If a board operates a kindergarten in a school, a child who is otherwise qualified may become a resident pupil at an age one year lower than that referred to in section 33. (Ontario Education Act, 1990, 34 [1])

Form of Acceleration	Example
Early entrance to middle school, high school, or college	A student shall be promoted from elementary to secondary school after 6 years of elementary school studies; a student may however be promoted after 5 years of studies if he or she has achieved the objectives of the programs of studies at the elementary level and has acquired sufficient emotional and social maturity. (Quebec Basic School Regulation, Section 13)
Early graduation from high school	The following are acceleration programming options: . . . early graduation. (Alberta Learning, 2000, p. 166)
Grade skipping	Students can be accelerated by grade when they are advanced in all areas . . . (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.)
Self-paced instruction	Learning contracts provide a method of individualizing instruction and developing student responsibility. They permit individual pacing so that students may learn at the rate at which they are able to master the material. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2010, p. 166)
Telescoped curriculum	Telescoping is reducing the amount of time students take to cover the curriculum. Courses often involve overlapping content and skills from one grade level to the next. Gifted learners may not need as much time to learn and remember the material. An example of telescoping is when a student completes Grades 8 and 9 math in one year. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.)

### ***No Support for Acceleration***

The empty cells in Table 4 indicate that we did not locate any support for the form of acceleration in any of the policy documents collected for a particular jurisdiction. More than half (55.5%) of the cells in the table are empty, which indicates more than half of the opportunities for acceleration had neither explicit nor potential support in Canada.



### ***Prohibiting Acceleration***

No policies were found that prohibited any of the accelerative practices; however, we did find text in documents from two jurisdictions that discouraged them. The first was the Northwest Territory's document on inclusive schooling, which stated, "It is strongly recommended that before considering subject or grade acceleration, the teacher offer the student many opportunities for enrichment of the curricular outcomes at grade level" (Northwest Territories Education, Culture & Employment, 2006, p. 25). Similarly, school administrators in the province of Prince Edward Island were also cautioned against acceleration: "Please note: Acceleration through the curriculum can present significant challenges for teachers and schools and is not a preferred option for meeting the needs of gifted or talented students" (Prince Edward Island Department of Education, 2009, p. 47).

### **Relationship Between Having a Gifted Education Policy Document and Support for Acceleration**

Point-biserial correlations were computed to examine the relationship between the existence of a gifted education policy document and the number of forms of acceleration that were explicitly supported in each jurisdiction (the third research question). This highly significant result ( $r = .84, p > .000$ ) indicated there is a strong relationship between a jurisdiction having a document focused on gifted education and the number of forms of acceleration explicitly supported in that jurisdiction's policies. It appeared jurisdictions that invested in the preparation of these documents also supported the greatest range of accelerative options.

### **Relationship Between Explicit Support and Enrolment**

To address the fourth research question, point-biserial correlations were also computed between explicit support for each form of acceleration and the number of students enrolled in each jurisdiction, to determine whether jurisdictions with more students supported a greater number of accelerative options. Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollments were based on those provided by Statistics Canada (Brockington, 2010), which were defined as, "the number of full-time students enrolled in September (or as close as

possible thereafter) of the school year, plus the sum of part-time students according to the time fraction spent in the classroom and for which students are funded” (p. 47).

Only the correlation between FTE and early entrance to kindergarten achieved significance ( $r = .85$ ;  $p < .001$ ). This indicated jurisdictions with greater FTEs were more likely to allow students to begin kindergarten before achieving the standard age of admission. There was no relationship between number of students enrolled in a jurisdiction and explicit support for any of the 17 remaining forms of acceleration. Therefore, support for most accelerative practices was not related to FTE.

## Discussion

Two features continued to characterize Canadian policies regarding gifted education and acceleration: flexibility and variability. Flexibility was evident in the consistent use of permissive language that enabled decision-makers at the district, school, or classroom level to determine the most appropriate options for advanced learners. Although there were some commonalities, variability was apparent in the number of forms of acceleration that were supported and in the language used in policy documents across jurisdictions.

### Gifted Education Policy

The five Canadian provinces that have published documentation supporting gifted education were also more likely to support more forms of acceleration. The documents collected from these jurisdictions varied greatly in scope and content. Alberta had the most extensive policy supporting gifted education, including acceleration. Resource guides from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and British Columbia offered similar information but were less extensive and detailed. Newfoundland’s webpage was brief; however, it contained more information regarding the education of gifted students than we were able to locate for the remaining eight jurisdictions.

Our findings indicate a number of changes since Goguen’s 1993 survey. Saskatchewan is now the only Canadian jurisdiction to mention the education of gifted students, in its education act. Alberta and Ontario no longer have legislation explicitly addressing gifted education, and New Brunswick and Nova Scotia now have substantial resource guides. Ontario does, however, mandate resources and services for gifted students, within

its Special Education Policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001). The forces driving these changes are complex and beyond the scope of this study; however, we suspect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and inclusive education ideologies are changing where and how jurisdictions address the distinctive needs of exceptional learners, including students identified as gifted.

There are a variety of reasons, five provinces and all of the territories were without policy documents specifically addressing the education of gifted students. Some may have been related to a jurisdiction's orientation to funding and service delivery. A categorical approach involves the assignment of students to categories of exceptionality in order to access services (e.g., students with gifts and learning difficulties). Provinces with one or more policy documents addressing students identified as gifted take this approach. Those committed to a non-categorical approach would not be expected to generate materials catering to a "category" of students. In those jurisdictions, resources are likely to be provided that support assessment and efforts to differentiate, adapt, and modify curriculum to respond to those needs for *all* learners, without reference to categorical labels. A less optimistic interpretation arises when jurisdictions maintain a categorical approach and no document can be found to address gifted learners (e.g., Prince Edward Island). If, as Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest, policies are often created to address perceived problems, a lack of policy in those jurisdictions may indicate no problems or distinctive needs are perceived. This may translate into a lack of recognition and services for gifted students. It is also possible that in some jurisdictions educational policies relevant to gifted students and acceleration were developed at the district level, so none were found at the provincial or territorial level.

Given the varied philosophical orientations across Canadian provinces and territories, adopting American pleas for categorical policy in gifted education in Canada may be unwise or unnecessary. We concur with Luke's (2011) recommendation that educators carefully consider the cultural, historical, and ideological contexts in which policies are generated and will be implemented, particularly when "importing" policies and related activities from other countries. He identified

a distinctive Canadian commitment to equity, to multiculturalism, and to a social contract between government, communities, and professional educators around education and the public good. This is about education and equity as core Canadian values, not a search for scientifically derived technique. (p. 374)

The existence or lack of policy related to gifted education may not be an accurate indicator of a jurisdiction's commitment to supporting gifted students. Given that some jurisdictions have a non-categorical orientation to the education of students with exceptional learning needs or have included them as exceptional learners who are addressed in their special education policies, future studies will need to consider documents beyond those focused solely on gifted education. Support for adapted, modified, and differentiated learning experiences is becoming increasingly evident in documents within and beyond "special education." Search terms, such as "flexible" should also contain search terms that represent inclusive practices that would include gifted students. The essence of any policy addressing the pace of all students' education will be flexibility, both curricular and administrative.

### **Acceleration Policy**

The variability and flexibility found in acceleration policies across jurisdictions helps explain the inconsistencies Kanevsky (2011a) found in her survey of the acceleration practices permitted and used in Canadian school districts. It is encouraging that she found some school districts supported a number of forms of acceleration in provinces and territories for which we found either no documentation or documentation discouraging acceleration. Silence at the provincial or territorial level, "either deliberate or unplanned" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 4), creates an opportunity for district- and school-level decision-makers to provide students with developmentally appropriate learning experiences aligned with their potential.

As in the previous section on gifted education policies, jurisdictions with non-categorical policies (e.g., Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories) may support acceleration without a need for separate documentation. Other jurisdictions that allocate funding categorically or in "blocks" (high and low incidence), such as British Columbia and Alberta, use encouraging, permissive language in relation to acceleration, which allows school districts or schools to make local decisions. Although Prince Edward Island's policy discourages acceleration, the language is permissive. Our results indicate the possibilities for implementing the various forms of acceleration are extensive nationwide, since no policies exist that prohibit these practices.

A second result that was consistent with Kanevsky's (2011a) survey of acceleration practices was that of greater support for content-based forms of acceleration than for grade-based forms. American researchers have explained similar findings in terms of "salience" (visibility) and separation from age mates (Southern & Jones, 2004). Content-based forms of acceleration were deemed more popular because they could be implemented in classes with age mates, which reduced their salience and eliminated the socio-emotional and administrative concerns related to changing grades.

The text search procedure in this study often located passages that mentioned independent study as well as one or more of the 18 practices identified by the National Work Group on Acceleration (2009). It seems that independent study, like other "best practices" in general education, could also offer students access to advanced content. It appeared in documents from four jurisdictions (Alberta Learning, 2000; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006; Government of the Yukon, Department of Education, 1995; Saskatchewan Education, 1992) and may also appear in other education documents beyond the scope of our search. For example, Alberta Learning (2000) makes their recommendation *explicit*, stating, "Independent study allows students to work at their own pace. Students who are gifted learn more quickly and more independently, and can concentrate for longer periods of time than students of average ability" (p. 121). British Columbia Ministry of Education's *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines* recommends "independent guided education" (2006, p. 52) for gifted students. This example would have been coded "potentially" accelerative according to our procedures because it appeared in a general special education manual and because it is possible, although not stated explicitly, that students *could* study material at a faster pace or beyond their current grade level. We recommend independent study be considered an additional form of content-based acceleration in future research and practice.

Categorical or not, permissive policies leave decisions regarding the allocation of resources and access to atypical pathways through curriculum to the discretion of decision-makers at the district, school, and classroom levels. Highly able learners are entitled to the many forms of administrative and curricular flexibility that would ensure they, like their peers, are learning what they don't know (Stanley, 2000).

## Limitations

Our search for policy documents was extensive, but not exhaustive. It is likely that relevant materials eluded the multiple rounds of searches due to the constraints of the procedures employed. For example, we are aware of Quebec's "Dérogation 52," which allows flexibility in the age of school entry. It came into effect in the 1980s (Gagné & Gagnier, 2003) but is not focused solely on gifted students or their acceleration. It allows an "exception to the age of admission to school" (*dérogation à l'âge d'admission à l'école*) and was originally intended to accommodate exceptional students who needed to begin their schooling *later* than the standard age (five-years-old by September 30). This flexibility also enables schools to receive funding for early entrants to kindergarten. We encourage educators to seek similar "opportunities" for flexible interpretation of policies like this "*dérogation*" (exception), that were not initially focused on the needs of gifted students, particularly those related to the age of initial admission, access to higher levels of education, and graduation. Unfortunately, this exception did not meet the criteria for inclusion in our study because it did not directly address gifted education or acceleration. It also eluded our searches because it was in French and, regrettably, our searches were limited to documents available in English. As a result, we recommend future research include search terms representing pacing and placement alternatives appearing in categorical and non-categorical policy documents in both of Canada's official languages.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to derive a simple summary from the data reported here without taking a position for or against acceleration. Support for gifted education and the many forms of acceleration, where they were found, was expressed in permissive language so there were no requirements that one or more forms of acceleration be considered or offered. It should be remembered, within this permissive context, that no jurisdiction prohibited acceleration so these options are still worth pursuing, even where they are discouraged.

Ardent advocates will see a serious need to strengthen support, even where permissive policies exist, since there are no mandates in legislation or policies requiring any of the jurisdictions to consider any form of acceleration as an appropriate option for advanced learners. Opponents will see too much support and will encourage decision-mak-

ers to avoid it and to eradicate policy and language that may enable acceleration in any form. Our position is that the accumulation of empirical evidence regarding the beneficial effects of acceleration more than justifies the need for advanced learners to be able to access advanced learning opportunities. What forms these opportunities take, and when and how they should be implemented, need to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Our findings provide a much-needed baseline for future efforts to examine trends in the nature and extent of Canadian policies related to gifted education in general and acceleration in particular. Baseline evidence is essential in times of transition, and transition is constant in education. Replications and enhancements of this work can, over time, provide answers to questions regarding the alignment of policy, funding, and practice, and answers to questions regarding the impact of reforms on the education of highly able learners. More rigorous analyses of the nature of provincial and territorial policies and the details of when and how these students are learning at a rate and level matched to their ability rather than their age will provide stakeholders with a better understanding of the strengths, limitations, and effects on practice of policies in gifted education (VanTassel-Baska, 2009, p. 1298).

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms assures all Canadian children an “appropriate education.” The needs of highly able students must not get lost in ideological transitions that drive changes in policy. Categorical and non-categorical documentation should be interpreted and implemented to ensure that the needs of advanced learners are recognized and addressed in developmentally powerful ways. The diversity evident among these students means they must have access to diverse, flexible academic opportunities in order to fulfill their right to an appropriate education and to flourish in schools. The varied forms of acceleration provide a smorgasbord of options that educators, students, and families may consider when seeking the “optimal match” between learning conditions and individual characteristics for each and every advanced learner.

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## Appendix A

### Documents Located for Each Province and Territory With Date of Publication.

Province and Document Name	Publication Date
<b>British Columbia</b>	
Course information for the graduation program: Grade 10, 11, and 12 courses	2009
Earning credit through equivalency, challenge, external credentials, postsecondary credit and independent directed studies	2004
Gifted education: A resource guide for teachers	n.d.
Handbook of procedures for the graduation program	2009
K-12 funding – General	2002 / 2008
Special education services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines	2006
The School Act [ <i>School Act</i> , R.S.B.C. 1996, c.412]	1996
<b>Alberta</b>	
Developing new solutions: Planning for students who are gifted	2006
The Journey: A handbook for parents of children who are gifted and talented	2004
Guide to education: ECS to Grade 12	2007
Programming for students with special needs, Chapter 7: Teaching students who are gifted and talented.	2000
Standards for special education	2004
Alberta School Act	2000/2010

Province and Document Name	Publication Date
Ukrainian language and culture 9Y guide to Implementation (4–6), Chapter 5: Students who are gifted	1995
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	
Children’s services policy framework: Supporting student diversity	2002
Core curriculum: Principles, time allocations, and credit policy	2009
Early school entrance	n.d.
Policy and procedures for locally developed courses of study	2010
Policy and procedures for locally modified courses of study	2007
Policy, guidelines and procedures for alternative education programs: Alternative grade 10, 11 and 12	2006
The adaptive dimension: In core curriculum	n.d.
Saskatchewan Education Act c. E-0.2; updated Jan 2011	1995/2011
<b>Manitoba</b>	
Appropriate educational programming: Handbook for student services	2007
Appropriate educational programming: Standards for student services	2006
Manitoba Education Administration Act C.C.S.M. c. E10; revised 2010	1988/2010
Guidelines for early childhood transition to school for children with special needs	2002
Independent together: Supporting the multilevel learning community	2003



Province and Document Name	Publication Date
New graduation requirements for provincial senior years diplomas	n.d.
Student specific planning: A handbook for implementing individual education plans	2010
<b>Ontario</b>	
Combined grades: Strategies to reach a range of learners in K–6	2007
Education for all: The report of the expert panel on literacy and numeracy instruction for students with special education needs, kindergarten to Grade 6	2005
Individual education plans: Standards for development, program planning and implementation	2000
Ontario Education Act R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2; rev. Jan 1, 2011	1990/2011
Ontario secondary schools, grades 9–12: Program and diploma requirements	1999
Special education: A guide for educators	2001
Standards for school boards' special education plans	2000
The individual education plan: A resource guide	2004
The Ontario curriculum Grades 9 to 12: Program planning and assessment	2000
What works: Research into practice: Combined grade classrooms	2007
<b>Quebec</b>	
Adapting our schools to the needs of all students: Policy on special education	1999
Adapting our schools to the needs of all students: Plan of action for special education	1999

Province and Document Name	Publication Date
Quebec Education Act	1988
<b>New Brunswick</b>	
New Brunswick Education Act c. E-1.12	1997
Gifted and talented students: A resource guide for teachers	2007
Inclusive education	2009
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	
Gifted education and talent development	2010
Let's talk about combined classes: Grades primary-6	n.d.
Nova Scotia Education Act 1995-96, c. 1, s. 1.; version I, rev. 2009	1995-1996 / 2009
Special education policy	2008
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	
Education handbook for school administrators	2009
Individualized educational planning standards and guidelines: A handbook for educators	2005
Link for age of entry	n.d.
Minister's directive on special education needs	2001
Prince Edward Island School Act R.S.P.E.I. 1988, S-2; Chapter S-2.1; updated Dec 9, 2010	1988/2010
<b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b>	
Coordination of services to children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador: Individual support services plans	1997
Department of Education, Gifted and Talented [webpage]	n.d.

Province and Document Name	Publication Date
English language arts curriculum Grades 10–12 overview	1996
Model for the coordination of services to children and youth: Child/youth profile	2002
Newfoundland Department of Education, Inclusive school culture [webpage]	n.d.
Newfoundland and Labrador. Schools Act c. S-12.2; Amended 1999 c34; 2007 c19	1997/2007
<b>Nunavut</b>	
Nunavut Education Act Bill 21, fourth session second legislative assembly of Nunavut	2008
<b>Northwest Territories</b>	
Northwest Territories Education Act rev. 2010	1995/2010
Ministerial directive on inclusive schooling	2006
Northwest Territories student success initiative: Administrative handbook	2007
Northwest Territories student support plans: Guidelines for development	2006
<b>Yukon</b>	
Yukon Education Act R.S.Y. 2002]	2002
Handbook for Yukon teachers (2007–2008)	2007
Special programs and services: A handbook of procedures and guidelines	1995
Special programs, Yukon Department of Education [webpage]	n.d.