

Acceleration of Gifted Students

Defining Acceleration

Strategies for differentiating instruction for gifted students generally fall into two categories: *enrichment* and *acceleration*. Enrichment refers to the presentation of curriculum content with more depth, breadth, complexity, or abstractness than the general curriculum.

Acceleration refers to the practice of presenting curriculum content earlier or at a faster pace.

There are many different ways to accelerate the curriculum. These options offer the flexibility needed to help meet the individual needs of gifted students:

- acceleration in one or more subject areas
- grade skipping
- Advanced Placement programs
- college courses offered in high school
- early graduation from high school
- early entrance into college. (Brody and Benbow, 1987)

The choice of how to accelerate the curriculum for a particular student should be based on the individual needs of that student.

Acceleration as a Program Decision

For many gifted students, acceleration is fulfilling both academically and socially. However, to be successful, acceleration must be understood as a *program* decision, not a placement

decision. The curriculum must continue to be challenging for the accelerated student. In case studies of successfully accelerated students, subject matter was carefully planned and monitored, and it addressed the students' social and emotional maturity as well as academic achievement. (Gross, 1992)

Benefits of Acceleration

Research shows the following benefits of acceleration:

- When gifted students were accelerated, there was an increase in their academic achievement. (Kulik and Kulik, 1984B; Vialle, 2001)
- Accelerated students tended to "outperform students of the same age and ability who are not accelerated." (Kulik and Kulik, 1984B, p. 87)
- Accelerated students achieved "as well as equally gifted older students in the higher grades." (Kulik and Kulik, 1984B, p. 87)
- Accelerated gifted students reported satisfaction emotionally and academically when the curriculum was challenging, provided them with options, and allowed for their input in the design and implementation. (Vialle, 2001)
- When course instruction and content was tailored to the individual gifted student's ability, acceleration was more fulfilling for the student. (Vialle, 2001)

Effects of Acceleration on Social and Emotional Development

Few studies have investigated how acceleration affects the social and emotional development of gifted children. However, the studies that have been published do *not* support the common belief that acceleration has negative effects on children's social or emotional development. (Kulik and Kulik, 1984A; Southern, Jones, and Fiscus, 1989)

- Case studies of individual accelerated children who had skipped at least one grade reported that the children were happier socially and emotionally and reported greater self-confidence and fulfillment after their acceleration. These students tended to socialize with older students before they skipped the grade(s). (Vialle, 2001)
- A group survey of nonaccelerated gifted students and gifted students who had grade-skipped, graduated early, or entered college early did not reveal any harmful effects of acceleration. There was no evidence of negative social and emotional adjustment as a result of acceleration. (Brody & Benbow, 1987)

Practices that Help Make Acceleration Successful

- Schools must have clear procedures and criteria for identifying students for acceleration. (Vialle, 2001)
- The classroom teacher should be knowledgeable about the needs of gifted students and must be supportive of the student's placement. (Vialle, 2001)
- Course content must be carefully planned, differentiated, and monitored to meet the student's needs. (Gross, 1992; Vialle, 2001)

References

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