

ACCELERATION

Educational acceleration is one of the cornerstones of exemplary gifted education practices, with more research supporting this intervention than any other in the literature on gifted individuals. The practice of educational acceleration has long been used to match high level student general ability and specific talent with optimal learning opportunities. The purposes of acceleration as a practice with the gifted are 1) to adjust the pace of instruction to the students' capability in order to develop a sound work ethic, 2) to provide an appropriate level of challenge in order to avoid the boredom from repetitious learning, and 3) to reduce the time period necessary for students to complete traditional schooling. Acceleration benefits many highly capable individuals by better motivating them toward schooling, enhancing their involvement with extracurricular activities, promoting more challenging options in the middle school and high school years, and preparing them to begin contributing to society at an earlier age. While not as widely used as a practice with diverse gifted learners, evidence suggests that it can be a successful strategy with low income, minority, and students with learning problems as well. Therefore, NAGC strongly endorses this practice as one important avenue to address the needs of gifted learners.

Acceleration practices involve allowing a student to move through traditional educational organizations more rapidly, based on readiness and motivation. Research documents the potential academic benefits and positive outcomes of all forms of appropriately implemented acceleration strategies for intellectually gifted and academically talented learners. These research-based best practices include grade skipping, telescoping, early entrance into kindergarten or college, credit by examination, and acceleration in content areas through such programs as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate at the high school level. Instructional adaptations in the classroom such as compacting, which allows for more economic use of learning time in a specific subject, are also a desirable and best practice for talented students.

Both group and individual decisions can be made in respect to accelerative options. For example, both AP and IB programs by virtue of their structure and content offer college-level work. As long as students meet prerequisites and accept the rigors of such programs, gifted and other learners can and should take advantage of such group-oriented programs. At an individual level, students may be tutored or engage in online coursework at an accelerated level. Such options can be more readily tailored for individual needs.

Talent search programs at selected universities provide early assessment of advanced mathematical and verbal abilities in students such that decisions on appropriate accelerative options can be constructed inside and outside of schools. For example, several acceleration opportunities can be accessed through online coursework in specific content areas or offered at university sites. Advanced Placement as an accelerative option may be made available throughout the high school years or earlier through independent study, tutorials, or special classes.

Acceleration options should be available at each stage of development in a child's educational program from early entrance to primary school up through early college entry in order to even out the curriculum challenge. Parents may also wish to seek out accelerative opportunities beyond the school setting in order to accommodate an individual student need that cannot be met in traditional school settings.

Yet acceleration decisions should be made thoughtfully with the needs of the whole child in mind. In decision-making about the appropriateness of a particular form of acceleration and the extent of acceleration for a given child at a given time, educators and parents should consider the child's intellectual and academic profile, socio-emotional and physical development, and preferences and dispositions of the child relative to the decision since acceleration may not always be the appropriate option for every gifted child. Factors that enhance the success of acceleration practices include 1) positive attitudes of teachers, 2) timelines related to the decision, 3) parental support, and 4) careful monitoring of the implementation.

Highly able students with capability and motivation to succeed in placements beyond traditional age/grade parameters should be provided the opportunity to enroll in appropriate classes and educational settings. The National Association for Gifted Children program standards provide some guidance for using accelerative practices on a routine basis at all stages of development.

Acceleration policies in schools should ensure that opportunities such as the ones described here are available provisions in all gifted programs for individuals and groups of learners ready to advance beyond the standard curriculum at any age and in any area of learning.

Selected References

- Benbow, C. P., & Lubinski, D. (1996). *Intellectual Talent*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
This book chronicles landmark research on gifted individuals and the use of acceleration in their development. Based on the work of many researchers in the field, the volume explicates our understanding of the effectiveness of acceleration techniques with such students, the efficacy of accelerative programs and services for them, and views on the interplay of intelligence and productivity.
- Colangelo, N., Assouline, S. G., & Gross, M. U. M. (2004). *A nation deceived: How schools hold back America's Students: The Templeton National Report on Acceleration*. Iowa City, IA: Belin-Blank Center. (Volumes 1 and 2).
In Volume 1, this report issues a wake-up call to America's schools on the need to provide accelerative options at every stage of development for gifted learners, using research evidence coupled with student vignettes of successful acceleration. The report argues convincingly for action on this key programming feature. In Volume 2, the argument for acceleration is further buttressed by actual data presented by researchers demonstrating its positive effects on the learning patterns of gifted students.
- Gross, M. U. M. (2004). *Exceptionally Gifted Children*, London: Routledge.
This second edition of a longitudinal study highlights ongoing insights into the lives of highly gifted children in Australia, their families and their schools. It provides important findings into the social, emotional and academic needs of these children as they mature.
- Rogers, K. (2003). *Reforming gifted education: How parents and teachers can match the program to the child*, Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press Inc.
This comprehensive text on program development provides meta-analyses on the issue of acceleration, coupled with sound practical strategies for employing it in schools.
- Southern, T. & Jones, E. (Eds.) (1991). *The academic acceleration of gifted children*, New York, NY: Teachers' College Press.
This edited volume provides a strong overview of diverse perspectives and views on acceleration in various modes and at various stages of development. It represents a compendia of important ideas for practitioners.
- Swiatek, M.A., & Benbow, C. P. (1991). Ten-year longitudinal follow-up of ability-matched accelerated and unaccelerated gifted students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83, 528-538.
This research article reports on the long term benefits of acceleration in a rigorously controlled study. Based on the Study for Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY) findings, the authors highlight the positive outcomes found for accelerated learners.

VanTassel-Baska, J. (2004). *The acceleration of gifted students' programs and curricula*. In Karnes, F. A. & Stephens, K. R. (eds.) fastback series, Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

This practical guide provides administrators and teachers with ideas, strategies, and assessment protocols for using various techniques of acceleration in school, including the diagnostic prescriptive approach, compacting, testing out of curriculum standards, and selection of advanced materials.

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The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) is an organization of parents, teachers, educators, other professionals, and community leaders who unite to address the unique needs of children and youth with demonstrated gifts and talents as well as those children who may be able to develop their talent potential with appropriate educational experiences.

All position papers are approved by the NAGC Board of Directors and remain consistent with the organization's position that education in a democracy must respect the uniqueness of all individuals, the broad range of cultural diversity present in our society, and the similarities and differences in learning characteristics that can be found within any group of students. NAGC Position Papers can be found at www.nagc.org.