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February Editorial 2023

Penina Kiss & Jennie Quinn

Welcome to the February edition of the WorldTalentWeb newsletter. We hope you enjoyed the end of 2022 festivities and that you've entered 2023 with great anticipation in the Year of the Rabbit!

This edition is dedicated to research and expertise in the practice of academic acceleration, featuring dedicated contributors with great experience in the field.

Wendy Behrens and Bruce Riegel from the United States share their findings from a study on subject acceleration, Annette Heinbokel from Germany outlines best practices in acceleration for gifted children, and Kylie Bice from Australia discusses why schools are less inclined to embrace acceleration as a strategy for gifted learners.

We also have a guest editor for this publication, Aimee Manicaro, who will share her first-hand experience of being an accelerated student during her school journey. These personal experiences put faces to the research and justify the need for an even better understanding of the benefits acceleration can offer when applied with care and deliberate action.

Aimee Manicaro
Guest Editor

My name is Aimee Manicaro and I graduated from a high school in Sydney Australia back in 2017 where I was given the opportunity to accelerate my learning. Since then, I have completed my Bachelor of Communications from Western Sydney University and currently hold the position of Senior Digital Marketing Specialist within the FMCG industry.

The notion of 'gifted and talented' was introduced to me at a young age where I was included in programs throughout primary school which enabled me to engage with work aimed at a much higher year level than I was situated within. For example, I remember early in primary school I would go to the library with a teacher to pick out novels to read for the week whilst the rest of my class had levelled books from a tub in the classroom. I also began to do Year 7-9 Maths when I was in Year 3 as I would be disengaged and bored with the curriculum set for my year. Despite the increase in difficulty with the work in all subjects, I would again quickly become bored once I had picked up the concepts which was a difficult cycle to break at a young age.

Once I reached high school, my teachers quickly noticed that I would breeze through the work set without error and struggled to stay interested in the content. I often felt my peers were jealous of my little level of input and the ability to receive top marks in all assessment tasks which upon reflecting on, is a valid response. I was placed into a gifted course in Year 7 and completed mathematics aimed at Year 12 students and undertook projects which were more suited to my interests. I did begin to feel pressure from Year 9 onwards to keep the status of a high achiever as my peers expected me to top the class and have my name called out in assembly each Friday morning; if it wasn't, there would always be a comment made about it. At the end of Year 9, I was given the opportunity to skip Year 10 Commerce and instead begin Year 11 Business Studies through Sydney Distance Education. The content was delivered online and I would complete classwork booklets individually to be sent off for marking. For many, the socialisation of a classroom setting is essential to the high school experience, but I thrived being able to learn at my own pace and without the distraction of classmates. I would often go to my classes, collect my work for the lesson and complete it in the library away from the classroom environment which was permitted by some of my teachers. I feel that other

teachers were inflexible in their teaching approach and forced me to sit in the class and learn alongside my classmates which made those classes difficult the older I got and significantly strained my relationships with certain teachers; up until the point of dropping a Year 11 elective despite ranking first in the subject.

When it came to Year 11, I was placed in a Year 12 Business Studies class with peers in the grade above me. The students were not welcoming, I was often ignored and left out of group-work and I felt they thought I was smarter or better than them to be in the position I was. This experience only worsened throughout the year as I received 100% on exams and hand-in assessments where my work would be handed around as an exemplar and they would scoff. I was extremely proud of my achievements, and I ended up finishing first in the subject however the first-place award for 2016 Business Studies was given to second place, a student in the grade above me. To this day I am unsure if it was due to a complaint by the grade above me who were clearly unhappy about my presence in their class however, I felt my hard work and achievements were not recognised. As I received a high 90's result for the class, I was able to take 9 units in 2017 which significantly facilitated my ability to excel in the classes I chose. As I am a very independent learner, I decided to do two major work classes, one including Extension 2 English which I felt the teaching strategies were tailored to my needs and shaped my decision of pursuing communications after high school.

Overall, acceleration enabled me to push my boundaries and excel in Year 12, receiving an ATAR of 96.95 which allowed me to pursue any higher education I was interested in. The socialisation issues which resulted from being placed in a class above my own were minor disadvantages to me when compared to the growth I experienced and the opportunity I had. I feel if I had not been accelerated, I would have lost interest in my studies and disengaged throughout my senior years as the boredom continued to grow throughout junior years.

Since high school, I do feel that my acceleration has allowed me to thrive throughout university and the workplace. Each year of my university degree I was on the Dean's Merit award list and found the work quite mundane and easy, however I would delve into the topics more so than required and undertake extra research which were skills I developed in school to remain engaged. I have also progressed in my workplace quickly with my work ethic and attention to detail which has given me the ability to be in a position of leadership and mentorship in my early 20's.

Whilst it is clear that acceleration has given me opportunities which would not have otherwise been available, I do feel that with my disengagement with my other high school classes and consistent boredom that a full year acceleration may have been more advantageous. My high school was hesitant to the idea, however I do feel it should be considered for students who have shown their capabilities and need more academic stimulation. Acceleration and extension should be considered by teachers throughout their analysis of students' capabilities and not something to shy away from. It should be an open conversation between students, parents and teachers on a consistent basis to grow students' academic ability in a real and tangible manner.

Many thanks to our authors for their contributions to this special edition. We look forward to sharing with you more exciting gifted and talented expertise from around the world in 2023!

Penina & Jennie

Subject-Based Acceleration

Bruce D. Riegel, EdD1 and Wendy A. Behrens, MAEd2

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Abstract: In its various forms, acceleration continues to be an evidence-based and widely used service provided to gifted students but remains controversial and unsupported in legislation in most states. Case studies, current legislation, interviews with state directors of gifted education programs, and a deep dive into the 2018–2019 State of the States in Gifted Education revealed vast differences in state policies and approaches to providing gifted services especially when it comes to acceleration. Of the 44 state responses regarding content based acceleration, nine indicated it is required, 12 said it is not, and 23 deemed it a local decision. When coupled with professional learning, subject acceleration triumphs as an effective method supporting student growth and talent development. With careful planning, the perceived barriers to subject acceleration can be overcome.

Keywords: acceleration, subject-based, content-based, single subject, gifted, legislation, services, laws, policies, regulations

In August, as Noemi was preparing to enter grade four at her STEM magnet school, her parents requested subject acceleration in math. As they explained, Noemi had spent the summer reading an Algebra I textbook she found at a library book sale. She immersed herself in the text, turning in "assignments" to her Dad for him to grade each evening. She understood linear equations, solving for inequalities, and could easily graph two-variable inequalities. As a pharmacist, Noemi's dad was confident in his math skills but not certain he would be able to support his daughter's burgeoning talent over time.

Noemi's situation is not unique, nor is the need for subject-based acceleration uncommon among gifted learners. An alarming number of gifted children enter school each fall, showing proficiency on end-of-year assessments for the grade they are just starting. Unfortunately, Noemi's fourth-grade math curriculum using four operations– addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division—to solve multi-step word problems involving multi-digit numbers holds no challenge.

Pressey (1949) defined acceleration as the "progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages earlier than conventional" (p. 2). Acceleration allows students to do this; it provides academic challenges for students who are ready. As determined through extensive research, accelerated students demonstrate impressive short- and long-term achievements. (Guilbault & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2017).

Noemi may be nine, but she is years ahead of her age mates in math. By comparison, her ELA scores are proficient but only high average. So, who are Noemi's peers, and how will she find the appropriate level of challenge?

For students like Noemi, subject-based acceleration is the only avenue providing the appropriate level of instruction and support for talent development. Subject based, often called content-based acceleration, includes a variety of strategies. These strategies provide students with advanced content, skills, or understandings before the expected age or grade level (Southern & Jones, 2015). Students typically remain with peers of the same age and grade for most of the school day but receive higher grade-level instruction. Content-based acceleration may also allow students to work on higher grade-level instruction instead of grade-level instruction within their general education classrooms.

For Noemi, subject acceleration allows access to the appropriate math level by attending a seventh-grade math classroom. Her new class provides an additional challenge while preparing her to test into the University of Minnesota's Talented Youth Math Program (UMTYMP). The UMTYMP program is a form of dual enrollment intended for students like Noemi, who are highly talented in mathematics. Noemi will spend the first 2 years of the program working through all 4 years of the "traditional" high school mathematics curriculum: algebra, geometry, and math analysis (precalculus). Minnesota state policy requires high school credit (credit toward graduation) for these classes regardless of the student's age. In their final 3 years, UMTYMP students earn up to 12 University credits in a sequence of calculus courses, emphasizing problem-solving, collaboration, and communication of mathematics. While content-based opportunities may vary per district, typical examples include content-based acceleration within the general education classroom, single subject acceleration, curriculum compacting, dual enrollment, credit by examination or prior experience, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate programs, talent search programs, and out of school enrichment opportunities.

Noemi is lucky to live in a state where access to acceleration is required by law. Minnesota is one of several states that require school districts and charter schools to create procedures for the academic acceleration of students to achieve a better match between their instructional needs and curriculum. These requirements, in Minnesota State Statute GIFTED PROGRAMS §120B.15, address subject and whole-grade acceleration and early entrance to kindergarten and first grade. In Minnesota, Noemi is guaranteed an appropriate curriculum. If Noemi lived in another state, one in which acceleration into another classroom for a portion of her day was unavailable, what options might be available to Noemi?

"WHEN COUPLED WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, SUBJECT ACCELERATION TRIUMPHS AS AN EFFECTIVE METHOD SUPPORTING STUDENT GROWTH AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT."

Acceleration is a long-term commitment that must continue throughout the student's career. The lack of access to acceleration or an improper acceleration can negatively impact educational and/or even socialemotional well-being. Tene's story illustrates the potential for harm when acceleration is improperly implemented. Tene attends school in a state with a mandate for gifted education and a law permitting acceleration. Tene was identified as gifted in mathematics and ELA and accelerated from first to second grade in kindergarten. It was determined that Tene should work with a fourth-grade mathematics class in the third grade but was making good progress and was happy in third-grade ELA. In fifth grade, Tene was moved to a Magnet School where acceleration was stopped because school system officials felt students were already receiving differentiated instruction at a higher level than other schools. Tene was placed with other fifth graders for all classes, which meant that Tene was learning the same mathematics content in the new school as the year before. When Tene's parents questioned the school, they were told that this was an accelerated school and that all of Tene's classmates would be on the same level now. Tene's grades dropped, and discipline problems quickly arose, as did Tene's complaint of stomach aches and hatred of school. Tene was evaluated and put on a behavioral IEP. Tene's parents fought the School Board to have subject acceleration reestablished in mathematics on a trial basis. After three months of debate and the threat of a lawsuit, the School Board relented. Within two weeks, the behavioral problems stopped, and Tene's grades increased. Tene is now in high school, working 4 years ahead in mathematics and ELA while on grade level in all other classes.

Tene's story is all too familiar to most teachers of gifted students. Fortunately for Tene, advocacy worked to reinstate her acceleration. What if the school board policy allowing for subject acceleration had not been reinstated?

Subject-Based Acceleration

Unlike whole-grade acceleration, subject acceleration is an intervention that focuses on a specific area of demonstrated student talent. Subject acceleration moves a student into a talent area of study one or 2 years earlier than their age mates. Subject acceleration may occur within the regular classroom or may require the student attend another classroom for a portion of their day.

Other School-Based Subject Acceleration

If Noemi or Tene lived in states where policy prohibited acceleration, what options would they have? As noted previously, subject acceleration does not always require students to spend a portion of their day away from their age mates. In addition, there are many other options available for students who need an accelerative experience at grade level. Southern and Jones (2015) have identified several options worthy of consideration.

Although the value of acceleration is well-supported by research, doubt over its effectiveness and uneven implementation in school districts remain. For example, Ohio adopted a statewide law (Model student acceleration policy, Ohio Rev. Code § 3324.10, Author, 2021d) and subsequent policy requiring districts to afford capable students the opportunity to accelerate their learning in various ways. Yet, in a 2010 survey of Ohio districts, results indicated people were either strongly in favor of the option or staunchly against it for fear of possible future damage to the child. "For all types of acceleration, more than half of the participants answered that the acceleration option was appropriate for at least some, if not all, students. The most positive attitudes were expressed about subject acceleration, which had zero negative perceptions selected." (Boyle et al., 2010, p.23, p.23)

The Study Revealed

Subject acceleration, which was regarded most favorably by survey respondents, is used more frequently and has increased in frequency more than other acceleration options according to survey and self-report data. While whole grade acceleration and early entrance placements have increased more than early graduation according to survey participants, early graduation is still more commonly used as reported on the self-report survey, many factors having led to a more rapid implementation and more favorable perception of some acceleration strategies over others. (Boyle et al., 2010, p.26, p.26)

Further, districts that reported a higher rate of gifted identification were found to report a higher rate of acceleration referrals. Single subject acceleration was the most commonly made referral and placement, and whole-grade acceleration was considered least often.

Access and Opportunity: State of the States

"Some students will be served best by enrichment, some by acceleration, and some by a mix of the two." (Neihart, 2007; Rogers, 2002; Schiever & Maker, 2003).

Acceleration is a cornerstone of exemplary gifted education practices and has more research than other interventions in the field (NAGC, 2004), and it levels the playing field of opportunity (Colangelo et al., 2004). In Rogers' (2015) meta-analysis of the impact of acceleration on gifted learners, she grouped 350 research studies into a more extensive study. Rogers found the largest effect was in the subject acceleration (average effect size of .51) and for whole-grade acceleration, an average effect size of.50 (Behrens & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2020) (Table 1).

The 2018–2019 State of the States in Gifted Education (SOS; Rinn et al., 2020) revealed vast differences in state policy for providing gifted services. While gifted services were reported in 49 states and the District of Columbia, how students are identified and served varies greatly.
Only 24 of 50 states had a mandate to serve gifted students, and 11 said it was a local decision. Many states lean heavily on differentiated instruction. Regarding "differentiated instruction," 43 responded. Of these, 16 indicated it is required, seven indicated it is not required, and 20 indicated it is determined by the local education agency (LEA). In addition, content-based/ single-subject acceleration, which is one of the easiest and least expensive interventions to support gifted students, also varied across states with 10 of 49 states noting that they have an acceleration policy, and 16 indicated it was the domain of their LEAs (see Table 2 from the 2018–2019 State of the States in Gifted Education report.)

Table 3 illustrates the responses by states regarding "acceleration" as a delivery model for grade groups. Again, the question was not asked for grades Pre-K and kindergarten, but three of 46 states listed acceleration as a programming option at that level (Rinn et al., 2020).

Although some states indicated that they do not have a formal acceleration policy, they do have laws or rules regarding early entrance to kindergarten (in 11 of 48 states and in 12 decided by LEAs), dual or concurrent enrollment (in 38 of 48 states), allowing middle schoolers to receive credit toward high school graduation (in 22 of 44 states and 13 determined by LEAs). In addition, many states indicated that they also offer Advanced Placement (in 40 of 42 states) and/or International Baccalaureate (in 33 of 42 states) as program options for gifted students. States were also asked if content-based acceleration was required by law or rule. Of the 44 respondents, nine said it was required, and 23 indicated that LEAs determined it (Rinn et al., 2020).

The 2018–2019 SOS also asked about education policy that might affect services for gifted students. Again, states highlighted a significant deterrent: the lack of state laws or rules regarding various forms of acceleration or that the policies are determined by the LEAs (Rinn et al., 2020).

Policy and Practices: A Comparison of Three States

While information like that found in the State of the States (SOS) seems straightforward on the surface, the whole story might not become evident until you venture

Table 1. Common Forms of Subject-Based Acceleration.

Classroom Option	Description
Continuous progress	Students engaging in this option are given new content as prior content is completed and mastered
Self-paced instruction	Students proceed through learning and instructional activities at a self-selected pace
Combined classes	Multiple grades are taught in the same classroom, allowing younger students to engage academically and socially with older peers
Curriculum compacting	The curriculum is adapted to include fewer introductory activities and less repetition
Telescoping curriculum	Students are provided instruction in less time than is typical with little or no repetition. Telescoping involves larger chunks of time than curriculum compacting, and the time saved always results in advanced grade placement. For example, 2 years of school are completed in 1 year
Mentoring	Students are paired with mentors who provide advanced or faster-paced instruction
Distance learning or online learning courses	Students enroll in courses offered by an organization outside of their school
Concurrent/dual enrollment	Students enroll in courses offered by an organization outside of their school
Advanced placement™	Students take a course at one level and receive concurrent credit for a parallel course at a higher level. Students enroll in courses offered at their high school and/or take AP tests. High scores on AP exams may earn students advanced credit in college
Credit by examination	Students are awarded advanced credit for completing some form of mastery test or activity

[a]adapted from Southern and Jones (2015).

into the details. For example, the SOS responses for Maryland, Ohio, and Texas are in Table 4 (Rinn et al., 2020). Texas, Ohio, and Maryland all take slightly different approaches to acceleration.

The three states were compared regarding several policies, delivery models, and whether those policies and models are under state or local control. While Texas has specific policies mandating gifted programming/services and one mandating acceleration, Ohio has a policy for acceleration, but none mandating services/programs. Ohio's GT legislation requires that if LEAs provide services/programs for GT students, they must follow specific state guidelines. Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas have specific acceleration policies (Rinn et al., 2020). In addition, there is at least one state where acceleration is encouraged and even mentioned in State Regulations but has no acceleration mandate.

While Maryland does not have a formal acceleration policy in statute; it strongly encourages and mentions acceleration in State Regulations and supporting guidance documents. Maryland Regulations mandate student identification using state-approved instruments, require services and programs, and require LEAs to provide professional learning for gifted students' teachers. The mandate for GT student

Table 2. State Acceleration Policy in Law or Rule (Rinn et al., 2020, p. 24).

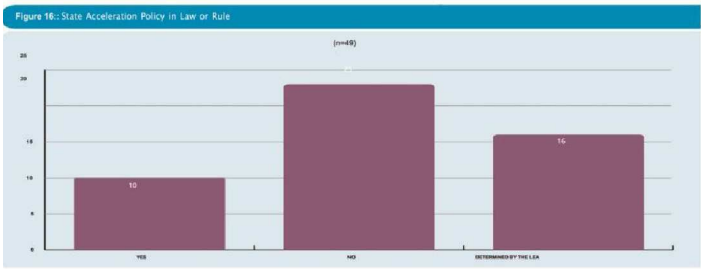

Table 3. 2018–2020 State of the States Responses Regarding Acceleration as a Delivery Model.

Educational (Grade) levels	Used as delivery model	States responding
Early elementary (grades 1–3)	28	45
Upper elementary (grades 4–5/6)	30	44
Middle school (grades 6/7–8)	7	39
High school (grades 9–12)	4	42

identification and services speaks of acceleration in its supporting guidance document. The "20 Types of Acceleration" from *A Nation Deceived* (Colangelo et al., 2004) are explicitly listed in the Maryland State Approved List of Programs and Services guidance required for use by all LEAs.

Many Roads Lead to the Same Destination: Summary on State Policies on Acceleration

When investigating the acceleration policies of the ten states in the 2018–2019 SOS that indicated that they had such a policy, it was discovered that there is no best or consistent way to write an acceleration policy. Several examples were no longer available, and several others included one-line or paragraph endorsement or acceleration requirements in the text of their all-inclusive GT education policies. Four of the ten states rose to the level of note as having specific language articulating criteria for acceleration, Minnesota, Illinois, Ohio, Florida, and Texas. Other states, like North Carolina, mentioned acceleration throughout their policy and should also be mentioned as robustly including acceleration in their GT education policies and procedures. This article will look more closely into Minnesota, Illinois, Ohio, Florida, and Texas policies.

Minnesota

Under Minnesota §120B.15 (Author, 2021c) Gifted and Talented Students Programs, LEAs are required to adopt procedures for acceleration and lays out simple requirements for its design:

(c) School districts must adopt procedures for the academic acceleration of gifted and talented students consistent with section §120B.11, subdivision 2, clause (2). These procedures must include how the district will:

Table 4. Responses to 2018–2019 State of the States Questions Regarding Acceleration.

Question topic	Maryland	Ohio	Texas
Gifted services/programming policy/mandate	Yes	No, but state guidelines must be followed if LEA provides services	Yes
Acceleration policy/mandate	LEA decision	Yes	Yes
Content-based acceleration required	No, but permitted by LEA	Yes	Yes, determined by LEA
Acceleration is a PreK–K programming option	Early entrance to K or grade 1 – LEA decision (information not in SOS, but confirmed by state)	Yes, but state guidelines must be followed if LEA provides services	Yes (information not in SOS, but confirmed by state)
Acceleration is a grades 1–3 programming option	Yes – LEA decision	Yes, but state guidelines must be followed if LEA provides services	Yes
Acceleration is a grades 4–6 programming option	Yes – LEA decision	Yes, but state guidelines must be followed if LEA provides services	Yes
Acceleration is a grades 7–8 programming option	Yes, but LEA decision	Yes, but state guidelines must be followed if LEA provides services	Yes
Acceleration is a grades 9–12 programming option	Yes, but LEA decision	Yes, but state guidelines must be followed if LEA provides services	Yes (information not in SOS, but confirmed by state)
Early admission to K or grade 1 policy/Law	Yes, but LEA decision	Yes	Yes, but LEA decision
Middle schooler can earn HS graduation credits	Yes	Yes	Yes
Advanced placement and/or international baccalaureate	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dual/concurrent enrollment	Yes, but LEA decision	Yes	Yes
Acceleration implementation impacts GT education services	Yes	Yes	No

1. assess a student's readiness and motivation for acceleration; and
2. match the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum to a student to achieve the best type of academic acceleration for that student.

(d) School districts must adopt procedures consistent with section §124D.02, (Author, 2021e) subdivision 1, for early admission to kindergarten or first grade of gifted and talented learners consistent with section §120B.11, subdivision 2, (Author, 2021f) clause (2). The procedures must be sensitive to underrepresented groups.

Illinois

Illinois created the Acceleration Placement Act that expands services to ALL students, not only those identified as gifted and talented by local policy, who demonstrate high ability and may benefit from the accelerated placement. Local policy development requires identifying such students through fair and equitable decision-making and multiple-measure assessment processes.

Ohio

Ohio passed their *Policy on Academic Acceleration, Early Entrance to Kindergarten, and Early High School Graduation* (Model student acceleration policy, Ohio Rev. Code, § 3324.10, 2021) which states the following:

In accordance with the belief that all children are entitled to an education commensurate with their particular needs, students who can exceed the gradelevel indicators and benchmarks set forth in the standards must be afforded the opportunity and be encouraged to do so. The (District) Board of Education believes that such students often require access to advanced curriculum in order to realize their potential contribution to themselves and society. All children learn and experience success given time and opportunity, but the degree to which academic content standards are met and the time it takes to reach the standards will vary from student to student.

Florida

Florida Statute § 1002.3105, (Author, 2021a) Academically Challenging Curriculum to Enhance Learning (ACCEL), offers the following options:

A. Academically Challenging Curriculum to Enhance Learning (ACCEL) options are educational options that provide academically challenging curriculum or accelerated instruction to eligible public-school students in kindergarten through grade 12.
B. *At a minimum, each school must offer the following ACCEL options: whole-grade and midyear promotion; subject-matter acceleration; virtual instruction in higher grade level subjects; and the Acceleration Options, Florida Statute § 1003.4295. (Author, 2021b) Additional ACCEL options may include, but are not limited to, enriched science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.*

Texas

In the Service Design section of the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students,* section 3.8 states

Acceleration and flexible pacing are employed, allowing students to learn at the pace and level appropriate for their abilities and skills, and are actively facilitated by district administrators, counselors, and teachers.

Recommendations for Drafting an Acceleration Policy

In 2018, Lupkowski–Shoplik, Behrens, and Assouline published *Developing Academic Acceleration Policies*:
Whole Grade, Early Entrance, and Single Subject. This publication lays out a blueprint for drafting an acceleration policy and provides resources and supporting information for anyone facing the uphill struggle of defending opposition again.

In the text's "Recommended Elements of Acceleration Policies," a best-practice principle is "that policy is characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness is foundational." The policy must also "include features that prevent unintended consequences" and appeals process.
Recommended elements of an acceleration policy must include the following (pp.12–13):

- Access to referral for consideration of acceleration is open to all students.
- All student populations are served.
- Student evaluation is fair, objective, and systematic.
- Parents and guardians are allowed open communication about the policy and procedures.
- The policy specifies a comprehensive data-informed student evaluation plan that uses multiple valid and reliable instruments for the purpose intended to assess cognitive, social-emotional, and developmental domains.
- Community has ready access to the policy document and procedure guidelines.

Each element is divided into sections focused on the following five questions:

1. Do accessibility, equity, and openness characterize the policy?
2. Does the accessibility policy provide guidelines for implementing subject acceleration?
3. Does the policy address short-term needs?
4. Does the policy address long-term needs?
5. Does the acceleration policy include features that prevent unintended consequences, for example, student class rank or grades?

Potential Barriers and Possible Solutions

Despite overwhelming research supporting acceleration, subject-based acceleration remains an under-utilized intervention (Assouline et al., 2015; Behrens & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2020; Rogers, 2015).

Personal bias and lack of understanding of asynchronous development may lead some educators to refuse subject acceleration or choose whole-grade acceleration as a "quick fix." Administrators may wonder how to provide an accelerative placement without disturbing the schedules of the home and receiving teachers. Others may wonder about uneven class sizes. Transportation to another building may also cause concern. In their 2010 survey of Ohio educators, Boyle et al. found the frequency of communication about acceleration policies to district-level educators and gifted specialists to impact the rate of policy development and first-level implementation (p. 26). Findings indicated the importance of communication and gifted education training for those in positions of leadership or gifted service and the importance of access to advanced curricular resources for accelerated students.
Additionally, concerns over the impact of acceleration practices on state accountability and data collection systems, state assessment use, and conflicting procedures within current laws remain to be resolved.

Summary

In summary, extensive research documents the benefits of subject acceleration. It remains one of the most frequently implemented interventions available (Assouline et al., 2015). Tools such as *Developing academic acceleration policies: Whole grade, early entrance, and single subject* (Lupkowski-Shoplik et al., 2018) can be used to create policy that supports all types of acceleration. When coupled with professional learning, subject acceleration triumphs as an effective method supporting student growth and talent development. With careful planning, perceived barriers to subject acceleration can be overcome.

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Bios

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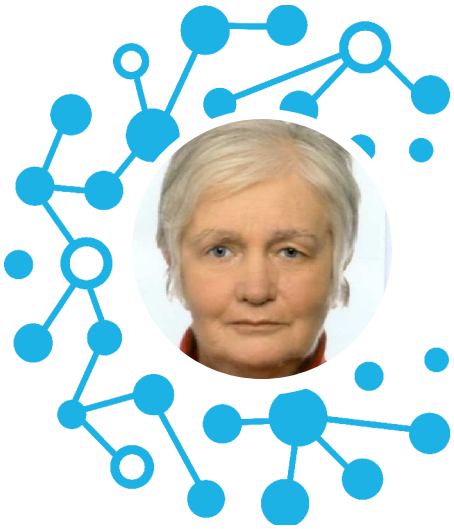

Best Practice for Gifted Children: Acceleration

Annette Heinbokel

There are two main ways of educating gifted children: enrichment and acceleration and their combinations. Enrichment is very popular among children, parents, educators and psychologists. However, according to the meta-analysis by John Hattie (2012) although enrichment can be very effective, on average it's not (effect size 0.39, which is just below being effective).

Acceleration, on the other hand, is not very popular, but more than twice as effective (0.88; Hattie 2012).

According to Borland (1989),

"acceleration is one of the most curious phenomena in the field of education. I can think of no other issue in which there is such a gulf between what research has revealed and what practitioners believe. The research on acceleration is so uniformly positive, the benefits of appropriate acceleration so unequivocal, that it is difficult to see how an educator can oppose it."

Although Borland's text is more than 30 years old, it's still true. I have not found any convincing study proving that acceleration in general is detrimental to the intellectual, social and emotional wellbeing of gifted children and youngsters; the opposite is correct. That does not mean that there can't be problems. The Acceleration Institute, Iowa, published a list of "20 Important Points about Educational Acceleration". They say that "the few problems that have been experienced with acceleration have stemmed from inadequate planning and insufficient preparation on the part of educators or parents" (Assouline et al. 2015, p. 3). I would add insufficient support when being accelerated.

My studies of grade skipping and my experiences as a teacher spanning several decades show the positive results of this option.

My first study covered the years 1980 to 1989 and almost 2000 schools in the German state of Lower Saxony. In the preface of the book of school rules it said at the time grade skipping was possible, but people should refrain from it because pupils often had to repeat a year at a later date. When the editor was asked what this claim was based on, he answered he had no figures, he just wanted people to be careful. Not a single pupil repeated a year and schools answered that very few children had intellectual problems in primary and secondary schools. Besides, few were said to have had social-emotional problems.

Although grade skipping was allowed, it hardly ever happened. In the 1980s, 99.6 per cent of primary schools, 99 per cent of grammar schools and 100 per cent of comprehensive schools had no experience (two or less grade skippers in ten years) – but everybody was sure it was very dangerous and should not be done.

In 1995 the law concerning grade skipping was changed, quoting my study. The grading system in Germany goes from 1 to 6, 1 being the best and 6 being the worst grade. From then on schools had to consider grade skipping if a pupil had an average of 2s. The children did not have to skip, but it had to be considered. Grades can be a starting point, but they alone should not determine who skips. In addition, there has to be motivation, emotional stability, and other personal factors. The authorities forgot, though, that teacher training was needed so that they knew how to prepare and to accompany pupils who skipped. Besides, there was no in-service teacher training on giftedness or on enrichment in general, either.

To support teachers and parents to take a decision, 'Entscheidungshilfen' (assistance to take a decision) were developed for kindergarten (for early entry into school), primary school and secondary school (Heinbokel 2012[2]).

In 2001 I repeated the study. The attitudes towards giftedness had become more positive, and I wanted to know what effect that and the changing of the law had had on grade skipping in Lower Saxony. Schools were asked the same questions at the same time of the school year.

Grade skipping in Lower Saxony 1980 - 2001 comparisons of school forms (Heinbokel 2012[2])

	1980 - 1989			1990 - 2001		
	N	%[1])	%[2])	N	%[1])	%[2])
primary school (grades 1-4)	279	89,7	12,5	1537	80,6	42,5
orientation level (grades 5/6)	[3])	[3])	[3])	136	7,1	19,1
grammar school (grades 7-13)	32	10,3	11,0	229	12,0	42,1
comprehensive school (grades 7-13)	[4])	[4])	[4])	5	0,3	5,3
	311	100,0		1907	100,0	

1. comparison of school forms in per cent
2. percentage of schools of that form of school with grade skippers
3. orientation level schools were not asked in the first study because it was no option then
4. no grade skipping happened at comprehensive schools

The numbers of grade skippers had increased from 311 to 1907. Schools reported some more intellectual problems (up to 10 per cent), but up to 22 per cent of emotional-social problems (boys in primary school). However, it is not clear what schools meant by 'problems'. If a child has an average of 1s before skipping, which then 'dips down' to 2s, the school may see it as a problem (grades are not a good as before). Parents did not see that as a problem, they were more concerned with the visible contentment of their child than with grades. Besides, quite often the children were in the top third of their classes again.

And if a boy doesn't seem to have a friend in his class but he does have some in his sports or chess club – which his teachers may not know – they may tick off that box as a 'social' problem.

This means that more research is needed to get a clearer picture: what is a problem that is definitely caused by grade skipping and not by external factors such as a severe illness in the family. That causes anxieties in a child and can be a reason for problems in school, whether they are gifted or not.

In the early 1990s I also sent questionnaires to parents (103). As grade skipping was so unusual at that time – and there was no enrichment yet – parents often waited too long before they contemplated skipping. It was only done when their child was really unhappy because of a severe lack of challenge. Before skipping, more than a third of the girls and boys in primary school showed behavior disorders such as real and imagined illnesses (headaches and bellyaches), depression, aggression towards others and auto aggression. In most cases these disappeared very quickly after they had moved to a more appropriate grade.

I also did interviews with 19 grade skippers. Parents and teachers can usually see that a child is bored in primary school. They worry, though, about the years of adolescence when their older classmates mature earlier, which can cause problems. Therefore I asked children who were 13 and older about their experiences. In some cases, there were problems but the older they became the more they also matured, the more these differences and therefore the problems disappeared. Girls mature earlier than boys, so it was less often a problem for them. All the youngsters attended co-educational schools, that means girls and boys learned together. Girls tend to have older (more mature) boyfriends, who are usually in a higher grade, that is emotionally a better fit. One of the older girls mentioned that, saying 'I didn't need to find a boyfriend in a higher grade' – because the older ones were in her class.

Asking adults about their memories is also important, so I did another study on them (Heinbokel 2016). Research during the school years is important, e. g. to discover unnecessary stumbling stones. When teachers, parents and the children are asked while the children are still at school, an interviewer has a good chance of getting a correct answer. However, months or even years later the answer may be different. Circumstances, either privately or at school, may have changed. If there was a problem in primary school, it may have disappeared in secondary school and vice versa.

Adults overlook all their years at school, and even if their memories are not correct, they will act accordingly, as parents, as teachers and as psychologists.

The birth years of the adults were between 1917 and 1987, therefore span 70 years. It was not forbidden but very rare before 1980, and the further I went back in time, the harder grade skippers could be found. According to her biography Elisabeth, the youngest daughter of Thomas Mann, skipped twice in the 1920s (she is not part of my study).

Of the largest group (36 females and 32 males), born between 1980 and 1987, almost 90 per cent of the women and 80 per cent of the men answered they would skip again if circumstances were the same. Even those who had had problems did not say that skipping was wrong but mentioned the problems that had turned up in their cases, e. g. bullying that the school was unable to prevent, and how they could have been prevented.

One of the questions asked was 'Did it matter to be smaller and weaker than the classmates after skipping?'. That was one of the worries when skipping was considered in primary school. Almost 80 per cent of the women said either it didn't apply, or it wasn't a problem. It was a problem, though, for 40 per cent of the boys. The main problem mentioned was not size but being good at sports. One man, despite being the youngest, had always been the tallest in his class but bad at sports, and that had been a problem for him. Another boy had always been the smallest, but was the best swimmer, so in his case size it was not a problem. It's a good idea to teach boys some form of self-defence, to make them feel physically confident.

In 2018 the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research and the 16 federal states started the LemaS (Leistung macht Schule) project. In the following 10 years they planned to spend 125 million Euros on the education of gifted children. 300 schools were chosen for the project. The first phase was going to last from 2018-2022. How the months of lockdown and the necessity of distance education because of the Covid19 virus influenced the project will be seen.

Unfortunately, acceleration is not part of the LemaS research. It will happen, but not be researched. When the Federal government was asked about it, the answer was that it was not necessary because enough was known about acceleration. In theory that is correct. However, that knowledge has not 'arrived' in the majority of schools yet.

There is room for research. If grade skipping is suggested by the schools, in many cases the children, the parents or both decline the offer. What are the reasons? Not enough knowledge about the advantages? Lack of support by the school?

In primary school the majority of grade skippers are boys. That changes at the age of 10 to 12: in secondary school the majority of the grade skippers are girls. As young boys are not more 'gifted' than young girls and in secondary school it's the opposite, what are the reasons?

Decades of research and experiences show the necessity for teacher training at university and later as in-service training in schools on the subject of giftedness. The recommendation to skip must be based on knowledge, and children need to be accompanied and supported on their way. Then more gifted children will profit from acceleration. Teacher training would also lead to enrichment being effective.

Every gifted programme must have the option of acceleration. If that is ignored or sometimes even prevented, the programme is not complete and therefore, not good.

Annette Heinbokel

Dr. Annette Heinbokel, Dipl. Paed., was a teacher and, in 1978, the driving force behind the founding of the German Association for Gifted Children (DGhK). Besides practical work with the families of gifted children, her research deals with acceleration as one of the options for gifted children who lack challenge.

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Embracing Acceleration: Why do schools continue to be frightened of this evidence-based practice?

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Why are educators so apprehensive?

One of my favourite quotes from A Nation Deceived (2015), and first penned by James Borland in 1989, is this:

"Acceleration is one of the most curious phenomena in the field of education. I can think of no other issue in which there is such a gulf between what research has revealed and what most practitioners believe. The research on acceleration is so uniformly positive, the benefits of appropriate acceleration so unequivocal, that it is difficult to see how an educator could oppose it."

(A Nation Deceived, 2004, p. 16)

It is a favourite because even more than thirty years later it continues to be highly relevant and unapologetically hard-hitting. And yet it is 2022 and education systems, school leaders and educators continue to feel apprehensive at best and opposed at worse to the practice of acceleration in any of its forms, particularly grade-skipping. I work with schools when they are considering an acceleration (or seeking a way to oppose a parent requested grade-skip!) and while there has been progress towards more willingness to have a go at acceleration here and there, I frequently hear the concerns. It is entirely appropriate for educators to question a practice they are unfamiliar with, yet despite decades of positive research findings, ignorance and mistrust of acceleration is pervasive and embedded in the culture of many schools and education systems.

Common concerns I frequently hear from educators about acceleration, and in particular full grade-skips, include:

- "She's so small for her age, she'll get lost with the bigger kids."
- "I was accelerated as a child and I hated it!"
- "He doesn't have the maturity to cope with the next grade."
- "She's socially isolated already, so going up a grade will isolate her even more."
- "The classroom teacher has seen no evidence of her being as bright as the parents say."
- "Our classes are full every year, there's no room for an accelerated child."
- "She is accelerated for English but if she is so clever why doesn't she know how to write an essay?"
- "What will happen when he gets to the end of high school and can't get his licence when the other kids do?"
- "If we accelerate one student, every parent will want their child accelerated too."
- "If he is partially accelerated now, what happens when he goes to high school?"
- "It's too hard to subject accelerate, she seems happy doing advanced independent work in her regular class."

The last two points above are indicative of an apparent additional set of unique perceived barriers among school leaders and educators towards subject or partial acceleration. In their 2022 article, Riegel and Behrens note that subject acceleration decisions are often impacted by one or more of the following factors:

- Personal bias
- Lack of understanding of asynchronous gifted students
- Choosing whole-grade acceleration as a "quick fix"
- Fear of disturbing schedules of the home and receiving teachers
- Worry about uneven class sizes
- Transportation of student to another building
- Concerns over the impact of acceleration practices on school & system accountability and data collection
- Concerns about system rules and procedures.

(Riegel & Behrens, 2022)

It is worth noting that the majority of concerns reported by educators are based on negative personal experience or instinctive fears, and a careful examination of the research offers an evidence-based counter-argument for each of these. In particular, concerns related to social emotional development (or a fear that social development will be damaged) and the perceived (and often actual) logistical difficulties with subject acceleration seem to be common among the school leaders and teachers I speak to. There is also a significant policy component to these concerns, as many of them are the direct and/or indirect result of educators being unsure about what is 'allowed' and how to manage logistics. I often work with schools who are seeking support and guidance around 'permissions' and logistical solutions, both of which are usually the role of well-written policy and procedural documents.

Research does not support educators' fears

For many gifted and talented students, there is only so much differentiation, extension and enrichment that is possible before they genuinely need to explore and learn above-level material. VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) argue that accelerating content must be considered as a priority by teachers when planning learning experiences for gifted and talented students.

The idea that well planned acceleration is harmful to children has been debunked many times over in research. In their 2011 meta-analysis of effects of acceleration, Steenbergen-Hu and Moon reiterated that:

- "Acceleration influences high-ability learners in positive ways, especially on academic achievement…
- …high-ability learners can benefit from acceleration both in the short-term and in the long run…
- …accelerants equal or surpass non-accelerants in self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence, social relationships, participation in extracurricular activities, and life satisfaction."

(Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011, p.39)

Again in 2016, Steenbergen, Makel and Olszewski-Kubilius confirmed the discrepancy between decades of research and continued fears about acceleration and pondered the recurring question, "If such a long history of research shows the effectiveness of most types of ability grouping and acceleration, the question of why it is not more universally implemented looms large for educators, parents, and policy makers." (Steenbergen et al, 2016, p. 891)

This was confirmed yet again in 2021 by Bernstein, Lubinski and Benbow in their aptly titled article Academic acceleration in gifted youth and fruitless concerns regarding psychological wellbeing: A 35-year longitudinal study. Their research continues to find that "Academic acceleration of intellectually precocious youth is believed [by educators among others] to harm psychological well-being even though short-term studies do not support this belief." and that "Concerns about long-term social/emotional effects of acceleration for high-potential students appear to be unwarranted." (Bernstein et al, 2021, p. 830)

Factors that need to be addressed

So, what are the key overarching factors that will increase confidence to consider acceleration options among school leaders and educators? Below is a list based on my own experience with supporting schools and educators, and I consistently find that if even some of these are evident then acceleration may be an option on the table for some individual students. Some of these are possible to address within individual schools and through employment practices, while others require system-level change. Consider which of these you may be able to implement in your context and if there are any others you would add to this list.

Individual educators:

- Pre-service training that includes acceleration and ongoing professional learning and support (if teachers have never heard of acceleration or been exposed to the research, then we are starting behind the game!)
- Have a positive experience with an accelerated student (or be a parent of one)
- Collects and considers evidence of above year level academic attainment (high quality, data-based teaching can be a catalyst for an individual teacher to advocate for acceleration for an individual student)
- Be supported by well informed school leaders and systems.

School leaders/Specialists:

- Have a positive experience with an accelerated student (or be a parent of one)
- Understand system policies and 'rules' or develop own policy if possible
- Base decisions, policy and process on research not personal experience
- Use an evidence-based process to make acceleration decisions (for example the Iowa Acceleration Scale or Integrated Acceleration System)
- Understand that there are many forms of acceleration and have processes to make the best acceleration decision for each student
- Understand that acceleration works best when well planned and all stakeholders are given ongoing support
- Subject acceleration – Have a creative, flexible approach to timetabling and work closely with staff responsible for timetables

Systems:

• Provide and/or model research-based policy and processes
• Provide clear, evidence-based policy and processes for early entry to school
• Proactive valuing of acceleration as a strategy
• Strive for university connections to ensure research-based decisions
• Ensure 'rules' related to funding, graduation, enrolment etc allow for accelerated pathways

These anecdotal factors may increase the likelihood that individual high performing students may be identified for acceleration, however they do not address the issue of equitable access to acceleration opportunities for a wider range of students.

The importance of policy as a key strategy

Around Australia and within each Australian state there are multiple approaches to policy that mention acceleration, from well-informed policy to contradictory to none at all. This means that teachers and school leaders can move between schools, sectors and states and hear a different message in each context about the extent to which acceleration is allowed, let alone have consistent guidelines for implementation. Anecdotally this lack of consistent policy seems to reinforce fears and misunderstandings about acceleration among educators and school leaders and offers an easy opt-out for those who are unsure or opposed.

Consider this example within a single school sector in one Australian state… The gifted and talented policy of this education sector states that "Decisions to accelerate are at the discretion of the school principal." I am aware that some school principals take this to mean they can choose "not to believe in acceleration" (I actually had a School Principal in this sector say this to me), while others in the same sector are willing to learn more and implement acceleration in the most effective way and yet when they contact their sector advisors for support, they are told that acceleration is not advised at all. (NB. I have deliberately chosen not to disclose the source of this policy.)

Another example is of a family who moved between two Australian states. Their home state has a clear and researched-based policy and process around early entry to school. This family applied for early entry for their young child and were accepted. When they had to unexpectedly move states for work, they assumed their child would be accepted in the same way, only to discover that their new home state does not allow early entry at all, and that no acceleration options were available to them unless they happened to find an individual school who might be willing to bend the rules.

While professional learning and pre-service training are important factors in informing educators about the efficacy of accelerated practices, progress can only be limited in the absence of research-based policy that stipulates shared theoretical understandings and guides practice. Research-based policy is the cornerstone of high-quality practice as it counters bias, mis-understanding and unfounded fears and beliefs of school leaders and teachers, particularly in the field of acceleration where there continues to be such a divide between understanding and evidence.

Lupkowski-Shoplik, Assouline and Lange consider the absence or

presence of evidence-based policy to be an issue of equity in gifted and talented education. "Acceleration policies move school systems [and in some cases individual schools] from being speculative in nature about meeting the needs of advanced students to being guided to make programming decisions that are appropriate." (Lupkowski-Shoplik et al, 2022, p. 148). They also state that "Clear, consistent acceleration policies are important because:

- They **can make grade-skipping available to more students** who would benefit.
- Policy leads to action. Policy **prompts educators** who are unfamiliar with acceleration the opportunity **to learn more about it** and **to use it**.
- Acceleration policies encourage educators to **consider all qualified students for acceleration**, not just those whose families are effective advocates, thus encouraging an equitable approach to this intervention.
- Well-written policies specify procedures that review all eligible students and **clear steps** needed **to initiate and follow through** on successful acceleration.
- Clear policies support the initiative to **provide professional learning to educators** in accelerative practices, therefore, expanding the utilization of acceleration."

(Lupkowski-Shoplik et al, 2022, p. 144)

Hertzog discusses the importance of acceleration in an early childhood context and with an emphasis on best practice for early school entry. While she emphasises that early entry decisions, as with all acceleration decisions, need to be bespoke for each child and early entry may not always be appropriate, policy is the key to offering equitable access education opportunities that acknowledge individual differences.

"So much is unknown about how each young child will grow and develop, policies must be developed that **are inherently flexible** to address individual differences in children, families, teachers, schools, and communities… Policies at the Federal, state, and local levels should be **designed for all students to thrive and grow, however out of sync they may be** with age expectations and school structures."

(Hertzog, 2022, p. 141)

It is, of course, important to reiterate previous research findings and to continue to reference the research into the efficacy of acceleration. In the absence of consistent research-based policy, however, it is impossible to move research and practice in this field forward. Without policy directing change and practice, even strategies that may impact pre-service teacher training, or understanding among individual school leaders and teachers, is likely to be limited. While there is some movement in certain sectors of education and among some schools and educators, addressing key factors related to policy seems to be a critical step to ensure a wider understanding and acceptance of accelerated practice for gifted and talented students.

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Please submit your article to the following email: WorldTalentWeb@ha.ae

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4. All non-native English speakers should make sure to check their articles for language accuracy before submitting them.
5. The article should be in Times New Roman font, size 12 pt.
6. Authors should avoid using footnotes.
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9. The article should be submitted as an email attachment as a Microsoft Word document.
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