### **ACCELERATION**

The classical understanding of the term *acceleration* is progress through an educational program at a rate faster, or at an age younger, than conventional. This is now referred to, more appropriately, as *academic acceleration* and is based on the premise that each child has a right to realize his or her potential.

Academic acceleration is valid pedagogy, is grounded in and supported by research, and is an appropriate response to the educational and social needs of a student whose cognitive ability and aca- demic achievement are several years beyond those of their age-peers. Yet worldwide it is an educational option little used. Even though the research on accel- eration is so uniformly and distinctly positive and the benefits of well-administered acceleration are so unequivocal, educators are reluctant to accelerate children, and some educational systems proscribe its transparent use.

This entry presents an outline of current theory of academic acceleration through a discussion of a curric- ulum for gifted students, the benefits of acceleration, a model for acceleration, guidelines for implementing an acceleration program, and ongoing issues related to the practice of acceleration.

### **Curriculum for Gifted Students**

The literature is adamant: Gifted students are exceptional students who have three basic educational needs. They require the provision of a curriculum that is substantially and qualitatively differentiated; that is prescribed, planned, articulated, permanent, ongoing, and defensible; that is based on students’ exceptionality; and that is predicated on the needs of each stu- dent. Gifted students require accelerated, enriched, and challenging learning experiences, with carefully planned, relevant enrichment and with content accel- eration to the level of each student’s ability. They also require counseling and guidance to foster cognitive and affective growth. Whereas most teachers and researchers involved with the education of gifted stu- dents agree that gifted students do require a differenti- ated curriculum, there is passionate debate concerning the form that this provision should take.

Counseling certainly is important for the social and emotional development of the gifted student and

should be part of the framework for any program

devised for gifted students.

Academic enrichment is worthwhile for most stu- dents and should not be offered to gifted students only. Relevant academic enrichment requires the pro- vision of a program specifically designed for the indi- vidual. For gifted students, this will naturally entail advanced material and higher-level treatment of topics within their area of special aptitude, and the more rel- evant and excellent the enrichment is, the more it calls for acceleration of subject matter or grade place- ment later. Indeed, acceleration may well be the most appropriate form of enrichment.

The key point is that matching the curriculum to the student’s abilities is not acceleration per se, but rather it is a developmen- tally appropriate teaching practice.

### **Benefits of Acceleration**

Academic acceleration has several administrative benefits. It is a readily available and inexpensive educa tional option. It is a way of giving recognition for a student’s advanced abilities and accomplishments. It increases learning efficiency, learning effectiveness, and productivity; it gives a student more choice for academic exploration; and it may give increased time for a career.

The report *A Nation Deceived* presents an excellent summary of recent research supporting the academic and affective benefits of well-administered accelera- tion. From this research come four important findings that are strong and clear and unequivocal.

First, acceleration is consistently and highly effec- tive for academic achievement. No studies have shown that enrichment programs or provisions give more benefits to gifted students than methods of

acceleration.

Academic benefits do arise from ability grouping accompanied by a differentiated curriculum, but the greatest benefit comes from academic acceler- ation. That is, accelerated gifted students, regardless of which form of acceleration is used, significantly outperform students of similar intellectual ability who have not been accelerated.

Second, there is no research to support the claim of maladjustment from acceleration. Despite the preponderance of evidence in favor of academic acceleration, concern about the social and emotional

adjustment of accelerated students persists. This con- cern is cited by both teachers and administrators as the primary reason for opposition to academic accel- eration. However, research finds no evidence to sup- port the notion that social and emotional problems arise through well-run and carefully monitored accel- eration programs.

Third, acceleration is usually effective in terms of affective adjustment. For many students, it removes them from difficult social situations and from unchal- lenging and inappropriate educational contexts. It exposes the student to a new peer group and, in fact, significantly increases the chances of a gifted student forming close and productive social relationships with other students. That is, academic acceleration goes a long way to meeting the social and emotional needs of the gifted student who uses it.

Fourth, a gifted student who is not accelerated when it is appropriate may well experience educational frus- tration and boredom; have reduced motivation to learn; develop poor study habits; have lower academic expectations, achievement, and productivity; express apathy toward formal schooling; drop out prematurely (there is at least some anecdotal evidence to support this); and/or find it difficult to adjust to peers who do not share advanced interests and concerns. That is, rather than expressing concern over potential socioemotional maladjustment arising from acceleration, teachers and administrators need to be concerned about the probabil- ity of maladjustment effects resulting from inadequate intellectual challenge.

### A Model for Academic Acceleration

It is important to see academic acceleration not as a single intervention but rather as an ongoing, holistic, whole-school process necessarily involving the stu- dent, the student’s caregivers, and his or her teachers.

Accordingly, Peter Merrotsy has developed an accel- eration model that recommends six steps toward a better curriculum for gifted students: identification, communication, a negotiated curriculum, academic acceleration, access to advanced courses while still at school, and support.

*Identification*

Identification of a gifted student should imply that educational action will take place. It needs to be remembered that identification is notoriously unreli- able, especially for gifted students from a background of disadvantage (e.g., low socioeconomic status or forced cultural minority status). That is one of the rea- sons why it is important to have a broad, inclusive curriculum and to have students involved in making decisions about their curriculum.

*Communication*

Each gifted student has a right to know the curricu- lum options and pathways available to him or her. Information about enrichment programs, extracurricu- lar activities, meeting outcomes in alternative ways, high-level courses, senior courses, academic accele- ration, and access to advanced-level courses while still at school should be clearly communicated to gifted stu- dents, and indeed to all students and their caregivers.

*A Negotiated Curriculum*

Gifted students are in a position to make informed decisions about their education. They should be actively involved in decision-making processes con- cerning their curriculum. Gifted students should be empowered to negotiate their curriculum.

***Academic Acceleration***

Academic acceleration appears to be the best and most feasible method for providing a challenging, rewarding, and continuous education which matches a gifted student’s academic ability and comes closest to meeting his or her educational—intellectual, social, and emotional—needs. In order to provide accelera- tion options it may be necessary to change the organi- zation of the school’s curriculum and, in some cases, to change systemic policy.

**Types of abililty grouping**

1. **Within Class Grouping:** A teacher set up group works based on students level of achievement with the same course assignements.
2. .**Between Class grouping** The adminstration of the school devides the students by grouping the gifted the students with other classes where the level of achievement is higher than their first classes
3. **Within Grade Grouping:** This is about grouping students according to their scores in mid term and final term examinations.