Acceleration

Acceleration occurs when students move through traditional curriculum at rates faster than typical. Among the many forms of acceleration are grade-skipping, early entrance to kindergarten or college, dual-credit courses such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs and subject-based acceleration (e.g., when a fifth-grade student takes a middle school math course). Many researchers consider

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acceleration to be "appropriate educational planning. It means matching the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student" (p. 66). [1]

In a study of high-ability children who had been accelerated, 71% reported satisfaction with their acceleration experience. Of the participants who reported they were unsatisfied, the majority indicated they would have preferred more acceleration. [2] In addition, in a series of interviews with students who were accelerated, an overwhelming majority of these students said that acceleration was an "excellent experience" for them. [3]

Some argue that acceleration can be harmful to students' self-concept, ability to fit in with older peers, or other social-emotional needs. However, research on acceleration has demonstrated multiple academic benefits to students and suggests that acceleration does not harm students. As the National Work Group on Acceleration determined, there is "no evidence that acceleration has a negative effect on a student's social-emotional development" (p. 4). [4]

In one study, students who were allowed early entrance to elementary school averaged 6 months ahead in achievement when compared to their age peers during the same year. Additionally, these students showed improvement in socialization and self-esteem compared to slight difficulties faced by advanced students who were not accelerated. [5]

In another study, researchers noted that a sample of students who had participated in whole-grade acceleration were not noticeably different in their perceived interpersonal competence (including interacting with others and their ability to form friendships) when compared to a heterogeneous group of students in the norming sample. In addition, the researchers found that the academically gifted students had higher academic self-concepts and more positive overall self-concepts than their peers in the comparison group. [6]

Accelerated students have also been shown to outperform nonaccelerated peers academically in the long term. A longitudinal study of students highly talented in mathematics showed that students who skipped a grade were more likely to obtain graduate degrees, publish work, and

receive patents in the STEM areas [7], and another report noted that these students earned other advanced degrees at rates higher than their peers [8]. In addition, researchers have found that, overall, acceleration influences high-ability students' academic achievement in positive ways, and that these students outperform peers in other areas, including scores on standardized tests, grades in college, and the status of the universities they attend and their later career paths [9].

Acceleration is a cost-effective intervention. Grade-based forms cost little to implement, and yield societal benefits in that students complete schooling ahead of schedule and become productive adults earlier in their lives. Costs of subject-based forms may be slightly higher, but still less prohibitive than other forms of gifted programming. [10]

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