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The Real Problems with Academic Acceleration by Sothern & Jones

- Tuesday, 18 March 2014, 01:37 PM

The Real Problems with Academic Acceleration

W. Thomas Southern & Eric D. Jones.

Summary

Acceleration is an educational term which includes many different procedures. Each type defines acceleration as "progress through an educational program at rates faster or ages younger than conventional (Pressey, 1949, p.2). The reason acceleration is even considered for a student is because the student's achievement does not match the curriculum being taught (34). Acceleration, to many, is a topic met with concern by many for different reasons as laid out here by the authors. There are issues that stem from 'conservatism' by teachers, parents and students (35), as well as, students' concern about keeping or losing friends (36), and the challenges in dealing with administrative practices (36). The authors show how the real problems with acceleration can be "recognized, minimized, or eliminated" (38). By doing this it becomes apparent that "acceleration is a valuable and necessary program option if we are to insure the educational achievement of gifted students." (38).

Highlights and Reflections

1. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, in both urban and rural schools, student performance steered decisions about placement, promotion, and graduation. Parent and educators did not appear to worry that academic acceleration would pose potential harm for academically precocious children. (35)

Why was this? Was it just the good-old days? Was it blissful ignorance? Or perhaps it was the fact that they trusted educators in those days because they were the experts (and society didn't have the internet to make them semi-experts). Multi-aged grouping, family grouped learning, home-schooling (predominately a way of the past, in most places, though it is making a comeback) has its perks.

Maybe it has to do with the fact that, back then, the school system was not that generalized & structured (e.g., same-age classes) as today. Standardization & control became important. I don't know any Canadian history of education though...

The view of teachers as the experts has certainly changed. It is quite surprising, some of the things we give up to go into this profession, as someone who has recently finished my teaching certificate.

: What would

Studies (Grades 10, 11 & 12)

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"Nation Deceived" report on acceleration practices and research

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Link to Advanced Placement courses online (for students in grades 6-12)

Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration

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Brief Guidelines for Grade Skipping, Early Entrance to Elementary School, and Early Admission

2. Pressey (1949) observed that evolution of grade-level structures began in the early part of the twentieth century. (35)

Southern and Jones note a few reasons that shaped the grade structures now present in the school system: cognitive psychology, mandatory attendance policies, attempt to get rid of child labor, and the imminent need to integrate an influx of immigrants. After reading this I understand a bit better about the historical social and economic background. It validates what I had thought was the origin of our present day school system and makes some connections for me.

3. Very strong and popular sentiments have emerged over the years that children are best educated with their same-age peers. The debate about the effects and value of academic acceleration of precocious children came forth with the development of a grade-level school structure. That debate which has persisted for over 7 decades.(35)

Wow! 70 years!! That is a long time! This definitely provides weighty insight. History plays a big part in this debate of the pros and cons of acceleration and it's all tied into the grade-level school system. My guess is that grades were supposed to be a guide line not a rule, but like so many guidelines, the root or reason for them is forgotten and people tend to make them absolutes with black and white lines to follow, be in or out of. It's time to change history and put this controversy to rest by using acceleration correctly, efficiently and effectively.

4. Ironically the term "academic acceleration" itself appears to contribute substantially to beliefs that the practice is likely to cause psychological harm.

It is funny how the denotation and connotation of words can be so different. The authors illustrate how people view acceleration: children being forced to work hard and fast with curriculum that is older than their age level can handle. This of course is not true. Acceleration of course is only for children who already have acquired the curriculum knowledge and skills and are able fairly effortlessly to move ahead from same-age peers to like-ability peers.

5. We have observed that when a student is young-in-grade, teachers tend to expect problems to occur. They are likely to attribute a wide range of real of suspected difficulties to the child's relative age—regardless of demonstrated precocity. Clearly the attitude of the teacher is of paramount importance.

family grouped learning look like? Like actually having siblings together learning or having groups of kids with common abilities or interests learning together?

I was thinking about homeschooling with a few families, having older students working with younger ones as a natural part of their education.

Hmmm, now I am thinking about one-room school houses, where children were split into different grades but they all learned together anyway. I've always wondered how the teacher actually structured his lessons. Was there benefit to this or opposite?

I wonder about the connection between same-age classes and Vygotsky's ZPD, in opposition to combined classes. Which model facilitates ZPD more? My guess goes with the second one, but I'm not 100% sure...

I like this statement, children mature and progress at various rates and we shouldn't hold them to a certain grade based strictly on age.

I think the grade-level school system has its roots in the understanding of schools as factories. From this perspective, children is seen as to be moulded by teachers in assembly lines (grade-level structures)...

I am suprised people view it as a term that causes harm. When I hear accelerated I think of advanced or something positive.

I'm also a little surprised at these connotations of having to work hard and fast! You are right, they should be able to do the transition fairly effortlessly, or they shouldn't be accelerated.

Yes, I think kids will adjust to their environment. All kids have difficulties in school at some point,

Regarding this quote, and your comment below I agree. Gifted, autistic, dyslexic, anxious, held back du to various environmental factors. We are all faced with our own challenges.

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... school, and early admission to college/university

...s Flowchart for decision-making re: grade-skipping

New South Wales Guidelines for Accelerated Progression

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Collection of Replacement Activities for Compacting

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Link to download "Ideas for Centres"

...um Compacting Resources from "daretodifferential

...survey of student

I thought that this was interesting. Preconceived notions and self-fulfilling prophecies are pretty powerful in regards to how teachers teach and treat students. This takes a mindset change; a paradigm shift for some. When teachers assume younger aged children will have problems then they often will.

6. Most students will experience a large number of difficulties, both social and academic, in their school career. Not every child will be universally popular, uniformly and perfectly successful, or receive constant reinforcement in the school setting. For most of us these experiences were considered to be 'normal' and part of the adjustment process we all had to endure.

This quote is linked with the previous one. Often students who are accelerated are expected by others to have challenges with academic, social, and emotional issues. Face it though, this is what being a kid is like: growing up and away from one's main caregiver, to developing friendships with peers of different abilities, beliefs and customs, and then dealing with raging hormones in a changing body. Life is tough when you are a kid. So assuming that challenges that gifted students face are directly, and only related to, being gifted is misleading. Being gifted may be a contributing factor but not the only factor.

7. Most of these difficulties and concerns could be avoided with preplanning....The real problems we have noted with acceleration can be recognized, minimized, or eliminated. Districts must take the time to recognize the need for accelerative options and plan policies and procedures for implementation. ...It is important,[however,] to recognize that acceleration is a valuable and necessary program option if we are to insure the educational achievement of gifted students." (38).

The authors have nailed down some problems and given solutions. They propose that the difficulties and concerns can certainly be mitigated by acknowledging students' achievements and abilities, provide counseling to students to relieve anxiety, having a professional be in charge of acceleration programming and reviewing the placements, as well as, recording achievements so that they fit with higher learning institutions methods of assessing. Preplanning and being proactive will ensure acceleration will help GT students succeed to their full potential.


Lingering question and its significance for me


... : True! Kids do need to face adversity to grow. Our job is not to take this adversity away, but to give the students the tools to work through it.


... : Very good point!


... : I don't have enough experience to answer this, but teachers teaching in combined classes that I know only have told me about its benefits. Graded schooling is a system to easily standardize & control students. Should these be main goals of education?


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 Link to download 3 interest inventories ("If I Ran The School", "Secondary Interest-a-lyzer" and "My Turn")

 ... Changing Education Paradigms (age-based education)

 ... aft & Final versions of Critical Inquiry Paper

 ...t on Google Docs if you want to revise your lesson

 ...e of Readings to Prepare for next week (July 10th)

 Article
Download:
Criteria Are
Critical

... Choice: Respond to One Reading and Discuss Three

Please bring to class on Feb 16th

... due dates for assignments due after February 9th:

Tool Kit pdfs

Critical Inquiry Paper & Peer Review

Growth Portfolio

20141-EDUC891-G001

20132-EDUC856-G001

20133-EDUC864-G031

20131-EDUC428-E100

20123-EDUC864-G032

Is our graded system of children attending school according to their chronological age the best fit for gifted students or even for the majority of children?

The statement by the authors at the beginning of the article sets the stage for my question "The debate about the effects and value of academic acceleration of precocious children came forth with the development of a grade-level school structure system." (34) Yet, research consistently shows that the "70-year-old debate" about acceleration should be put to rest. A differently set up system, without grades, may in fact be better for gifted and talented children. There are many types of educational programs available. Parents and teachers should always be on the look out to find the best educational setting and program for their children. I often wonder as a parent and a teacher of children with special needs what is the best thing for my kids?

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Exceptionally Gifted Children: Long-Term Outcomes of Academic Acceleration and Nonacceleration

- Saturday, 22 March 2014, 06:38 PM

Exceptionally Gifted Children: Long-Term Outcomes of Academic Acceleration and Nonacceleration

Miraca U. M. Gross

Summary

This is a report on a 20 year study conducted on the progress of exceptionally gifted children in Australia with IQs of 160 or higher. It concludes that the gifted children were accelerated by two or more grades had the best long term outcomes. They were more likely to have further academic degrees and have good social relationships with those around them. The gifted children who were not accelerated at all were most likely to have no education beyond high school or to have dropped out of school altogether. They were also more likely to have problems with relationships later in life. The optimal time for acceleration is in the early years rather than later.

Highlights and Reflections

Let us take a child of average intellectual ability, and when he is 5 years old, let us place him in a class of children with severe intellectual disabilities, children whose IQs are at least four standard deviations lower than his. The child will stay with this group for the duration of his schooling and he will undertake the curriculum designed for the class, at the level and pace of the class. (p. 404)

I thought this was an excellent way to get us to understand what it must feel like to be an exceptionally gifted person in the regular classroom. It really made me realise what it must be like to so out of step with your peer group. If this is how we are treating the exceptionally gifted then we really are doing them a terrible disservice and shouldn't be surprised if the outcomes are less than positive.

She defined the IQ range of 125-155 as "socially optimal intelligence"

Wow, this is an excellent quote! This immediately made me want to skip the child. But actually, I think I'm coming to decide that even skipping a child won't necessarily put him with students that ponder and question things in the same way.

I'm thinking just common-sensically, that academically gifted students would get the best stimulation in a class full of other academically gifted students.

It does make sense to me, that they might be more in step with an older peer group.

people that are this bright do have struggles

- Studies (Grades 10, 11 & 12)
- Download article on Acceleration Practices in Canada
- "Nation Deceived" report on acceleration practices and research
- Link to Education Program for Gifted Youth @ Stanford University (for all grade levels)
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- High Ability Students Start School in January?..."
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- Article: The Real Problems with Academic Acceleration
- Link to research article on "Acceleration Practices in Canada"
- Brief Guidelines for Grade Skipping, Early Entrance to Elementary School, and Early Admission

(Hollingworth, 1926). She found that while children scoring in this range were socially self-confident young people who enjoyed the friendship of age peers, children with IQs of 160 and above experienced ongoing problems of social isolation. (p.406)

This was interesting because it defines the ranges of giftedness out there and at what level a high IQ is going to start causing people to become alienated from their peers. I don't think I have ever come across someone with such a high IQ. It must be very difficult for those of that ability to find like minds to converse with and frustrating for them to have to always be learning with people who are so far behind them.

This girl, with an IQ of 180, was referred to the study by the psychiatrist who was treating her for severe depression; she had been retained with age peers in the "inclusion" classroom for 8 years without even the temporary relief of a pullout program. (p.410)

This poor student is being treated for depression because of the situation she has been put in. I can't even conceive of what it must be like to have such a high IQ and to be stuck wasting time for an entire school career. The word torture springs to mind.

This study has adopted a rather cautious definition of reading: the capacity to decode and comprehend more than five words from a printed source without the use of pictures as visual cues. Under this definition, more than 40 of the 60 children were reading before their fourth birthday and all but one were reading before school entry.

When the mother of 5-year-old Richard McLeod asked his teacher if he could be permitted to skip the "reading readiness" program because he had been reading since age 2, the teacher angrily accused her of teaching the boy to read. "You leave him to me," she added. "It's my duty to pluck the tall poppies." (p. 412)

I was not aware that there was such a strong correlation between early reading and giftedness and I am wondering if that means that it is not usual for children to be reading before they start school. I am not familiar with the expected abilities of children when they start school. That in mind I found the comment by the teacher that there was something wrong with parents teaching their children to read really shocking. Why shouldn't a parent teach their child to read if that is what the child is capable of?

The following year, Chris then took the rather unusual course of "repeating" 11th grade with an additional five subjects-English, legal studies, Australian history, accounting, and biology. This was by no means an attempt to reverse the acceleration process; it was Chris's decision because he felt he would be too young to enter university at age 13, and this alternate plan would give him a breadth of studies that would be otherwise unavailable. (p.413)

I liked the mature approach by this student. It seems an excellent idea for

connecting with others but when they do, it is amazing to watch them bloom! we have a few that would be here I think and if they hadn't found each other, I'm not sure they would be doing so well....

...: did it discuss why she was in this situation? why didn't they make any changes?

...: Torture indeed. An IQ of 180 blows me away. I wonder how much a different style of learning would have helped her. Were there other factors behind her depression? i.e. a predisposition toward depression?

...: Oh my, what kind of a teacher is this?

...: I actually wonder about this as well, though it makes sense to have a correlation between early reading and giftedness, but from other studies I've come to believe that early reading is not necessarily a sign of giftedness and a child can plateau.

They seemed to suggest a link, but early reading could just be a sign of parental involvement.

...: it might be a bit of both. if the kids are teaching themselves to read, then sign of giftedness. If it's happening because of involvement, that doesn't say not gifted but parent involvement will be there for the kids. But wow to teacher! scary...

...: I liked this choice too. In my readings of acceleration thus far, this seems like one of the best solutions. Adults should take initiative to offer these children different projects and opportunities, rather than just moving up through school

...: I struggled when i went to university because i had never been challenged before then and didn't know any strategies for dealing with things that weren't instantly easy for me.

This could be a true statement for the gifted as well as non-gifted, but this point slightly different from the quote I think. It has to do with lack of ability, though it is lack of ability in

to College

... school, and early admission to college/university

...s Flowchart for decision-making re: grade-skipping

New South Wales Guidelines for Accelerated Progression

...ation Deceived Report (readings are from Volume 2)

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...um Compacting Resources from "daretodifferential"

...survey of student

the student to use their ability to gain breadth while they are able as this option may not be open to them later in life. Having a good breadth of knowledge is going to help them and also gives them the opportunity to try different things.

The last thing they felt, as children or adolescents, was "included." With few exceptions, they have very jaded views of their education. Two dropped out of high school and a number have dropped out of university. Several more have had ongoing difficulties at university, not because of lack of ability but because they have found it difficult to commit to undergraduate study that is less than stimulating. (p. 417)

This was heartbreaking to read. These are students that have been identified as having an extremely high ability and they are put off the school system entirely because it fails to meet their needs. I think we need to hold this in mind when thinking about what is best for our students. Those that have made it to university have not been taught how to study or how to pick subjects that they will want to continue with.

Lingering Question and its significance for me.

These case studies are for the very highly gifted and I am wondering how this transfers to the moderately gifted?

From the article I get the idea that acceleration for these extremely gifted children is the preferred solution. The concerns that they might end up alienated from their peers by being accelerated has shown to be unfounded and that they are more likely to be alienated by being left with peers who are not operating at the same level. These are extremely gifted children, but the article claims that students with IQs less than 160 are able to form relationships with peers. However I wonder if there is also a benefit of acceleration for these students that goes beyond the social and if it is better for all students to be situated by their level rather than their

strategies rather than subject matter. Interesting point

: I also think it ties into the Deferential Differentiation article. Kids need to learn to do work that they don't like because we can't always do things our way. Sometimes, we have to conform and kids need to learn how to earlier.

: I think if there are some kids who will still have social struggles due to their giftedness. Acceleration might not be the answer all the time to opportunities to work with like minded peers are good for all high ability kids, even for a short time.

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